

## **The Gospel of Mark**

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

#### **The Rough Jesus**

- Pretend that before you read Mark's gospel you have only heard the basics of the Jesus story: he was a man who was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. What is your response to this story of Jesus in the flesh, in the context of his physical body, life, and relationships? Does it make you desire to follow Jesus more or is Jesus's physicality somewhat off-putting?
- What impact does the fact that so much happens immediately in Mark's gospel have on you as a reader?
- Mark does not shy away from violent language or difficult topics. He paints a gritty and realistic picture of certain scenarios and characters in his narrative. Does this clash with our idea of what is appropriate or acceptable to talk to regarding matters of faith, church, theology, etc.?

#### **The Lonely Messiah**

- Mark's Jesus loses more people the closer he gets to the cross. Is this true in our lives as well? How might this be true of the church?
- How does Mark's Jesus handle the abandonment by his own family? Is this a good model?
- Mark's Jesus demonstrates how to create a life-giving community? How is this in tension with or part of Jesus as a lonely figure?

#### **An Emotional Jesus**

- Are you uncomfortable with this emotional Jesus? Why or why not?
- How does learning about an emotional Jesus change how you feel about him and his actions?
- What connections do you see between Jesus' emotions and his actions?

#### **A Secret Son of God**

- If Mark tells us at the very beginning of the gospel that Jesus is the Son of God, what does he accomplish by making the characters in the narrative keep it a secret?
- The first direct words spoken to Jesus by a human being in Mark's gospel are from his disciples: "Everyone is searching for you?" What do we look for when we read the gospel?
- How does our identity become confused when we do not clearly understand the identity of Jesus?

## **Jesus the Liberator**

- What different types of liberation does Mark portray?
- How is Jesus's statement that he "gives his life as a ransom for many" more than just a prediction of his crucifixion?
- How are you serving as a liberator in your community?

## **The Authority of Jesus**

- Read Mark 6:21-29 and 6:37-44. How does the picture of Jesus feeding the multitudes in the wilderness differ from Mark's description of Herod's banquet? Who do you think has more authority and why?
- What does Jesus give his disciples the authority to do? How could we apply this to our task as the Jesus community? What do we have the authority to do and to not do?
- How have you seen the church use her authority to do good? How have you seen the church use her authority in ways that cause harm? How can you help the church do good / do no harm?

## **Critique of Culture**

- Thinking about Jesus's teaching about what defiles something, what does Jesus claim is (or is not) being emitted by the temple culture?
- How is the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman a good demonstration of what does and does not defile someone?
- Jesus's harsh criticism was not just reserved for his adversaries, but was also lobbed at his own family and disciples. What role must self-critique play in the life of the church as it attempts to follow Jesus?
- How are you looking inside yourself and practicing self-criticism?

## **Discipleship According to Mark**

- How is discipleship "searching for Jesus?" Where and how do we search for Jesus?
- Is Jesus a good teacher to his disciples? Why or why not?
- Think about one of the most important lessons you have ever learned. Did you learn it the hard way or the easy way?
- What is your job as a disciple of Jesus? How are you living this out daily?

## **Power, faith, and prayer (Mark 9)**

- What do you think are the relationships between power, faith, and prayer?
- What concepts and images of power were you raised to recognize?
- How are they different or similar to the images seen in Mark 9?

### **The Ego (Mark 10)**

- Where have you fallen prey to “better-than-ness?”
- Has it caused you to harm and dehumanize others who bear the image of God present in humanity?
- What does it look like for us to die to egos as individuals and a community of faith?

### **A Different kind of Authority (Mark 11)**

- What about Mark’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is surprising to you, especially if this is a familiar story? How does that change your understanding of the importance of this story?
- How might this story have been important or inspiring to a first century Jesus follower? How is it important or inspiring to us in the 21st century?
- How does Mark’s “sandwich” of the fig tree story around his retelling of the cleansing of the temple make the cleansing story more powerful or impactful?
- Which character(s) do you most identify with in your faith journey right now? A pilgrim headed toward the temple? The colt who has been called to help bring Jesus into the city? A disciple still figuring out what exactly Jesus is all about? One of the religious leaders whose weaknesses are being revealed by Jesus? How have you been all of these characters?

### **Dying to Façade (Mark 12)**

- Often, we hear parts of this chapter separate from the larger narrative. How does hearing each of these scenes as one narrative, continued from Jesus’ cleansing the temple, change how you hear each of these stories
- What do you think the religious’ leaders’ greatest fears were about Jesus
- Where do you see grace in the midst of this narrative, even though Jesus pretty harshly calls out his hearers?
- How do you think the onlooking crowd was experiencing these events
- What masks or facades might you need to consider in your own life that keep you from recognizing God’s power or following Jesus completely?

### **Dying to Comfort (Mark 13)**

- Of all the things in this chapter, what do you find to be the most difficult?
- How does knowing this chapter follows Jesus sharing a parable of a man who leaves his vineyard in the care of laborers help shed light on its meaning for us as disciples?
- Consider Jesus’ instructions to his disciples to stay alert and be vigilant. When an account is required of us (his current disciples), will we be found awake and working, or asleep?

## Jesus prepares to die (Mark 14)

- In this chapter we see a woman anoint Jesus with expensive perfume, giving everything she had. What does giving everything you have/everything you are to Jesus look like? What does it mean for you to serve people the way Jesus called you to, with all that you are?
- Judas – along with Jesus’s family, friends, and the 12 – falls into a pattern of misunderstanding and failure. In this way, Judas is no different than the rest of them. How have you also found yourself falling into this pattern?
- Jesus’ Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is very human “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me.” When have you prayed a prayer like Jesus?
- Jesus finishes the prayer with “However—not what I want but what you want.” How could praying these words shape your own prayer life?
- Chapter 14 begins with the woman giving all she has to the person and ministry of Jesus and ends with his disciples running away, one betraying him and Peter following but from afar. What do you make of this juxtaposition?