

BUILD Text Study for Thursday, July 7
Shiloh Baptist Church
10:30am-12pm

Colleagues, at Open Door Church the gospel of Mark has become particularly formative in our corporate and personal identity as followers of Christ. Recent converts work through this gospel first and we make sure to teach from it every year. I look forward to learning with you as we attempt to “read from below”. We begin with Mark 1:9-15.

~Adam Jones

Preparing to Address the Text:

“When Mark is reduced to a religious story for individual modern Western readers, moreover, Jesus’ sustained public campaign of preaching and healing in remote village communities and his execution by the Romans as a rebel leader becomes a mere backdrop for the devout individual disciple’s struggle between guilt and repentance, between doubt and recommitment. ...Starting with the setting of Mark in a “colonized” or “third-world” country, the obvious first step is to gain some sense of ancient Judeans and Galileans as people subjected to empire.”
Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*

Notes on the Text

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. *Can anything good come from Nazareth? No one touted their “Nazareth” roots at this time, but Mark stresses it. Jesus is baptized, at this point, like all the others. Nothing here to set him apart.*

Horsley notes that the “baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins” recalls key elements of the Exodus story, the Passover forgiveness, the ritual preparation of the people for renewal, the “baptism” through the Red Sea. Jesus joins the Exodus/renewal movement officially. Forgiveness of sins is key as it is often the sins of the people that derail the movement of God throughout the Bible.

10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The Spirit is a notorious and redemptive actor in the long story of God. The Spirit historically signals hope in the midst of oppression or exile. Ched Myers notes that the tearing of the heavens recalls apocalyptic imagery from Isaiah 64 (Binding the Strong Man). The narrative function here is to introduce the “one stronger than I”. The voice validates the redemptive/restorative outsider who has ended his participation in “status quo” and embraced his baptized identity as God’s chosen prophet/deliverer. The mantle is passed from John to Jesus.

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

A preparation is occurring recalling the 40 year wilderness testing of the Israelites. For Moses it was 40 years before the renewal of Israel, for Elijah it was 40 days. The wilderness often, if not always, functioned as a training context and refuge for the necessary outsider/deliverer.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

An abrupt transition, Jesus begins his movement in earnest. The word "time" is "Kairos" in Greek denoting a break in chronological time in which an eternal moment filled with possibility is present. A "kingdom" is proposed, over against the current kingdom of empire and oppression.

Background:

In the opening decade of the first century, the Roman emperor Augustus declared his reign the Pax Romana, that is, a season of total peace in the Roman Empire. Josephus recounts that rather than a period of peace in Israel, the so-called Pax Romana really was a time of numerous violent uprisings against Roman rule. One account by Josephus is worthy of particular note. He reports that roughly contemporaneous with the birth of Jesus, the Roman military crucified some 2,000 people in the Galilean city of Sepphoris as punishment for rebelling against Roman rule (Ant. 17:295).

It must not be forgotten that even while he is worshipped as the Son of God, until his last earthly breath Jesus was also an oppressed Roman colonial subject with all that meant and implied. Thus more than any other factor, it was the Roman colonial occupation of Israel and its deleterious effect on the people's lives that was the context for the formative years of Jesus. (Obery Hendricks, "*Which Jesus Shall We Teach?*")

In short, Galileans and Judeans among whom Jesus led the movement that forms the subject of Mark's story had thus been subjected to foreign empires for many centuries...Roman imperial rule and Roman imposition of Herod as king while maintaining the temple-state and high priesthood, meant three layers of rulers over the people. And it meant three layers of rulers demanding their produce: tribute to Rom, taxes to support Herod and his building projects, and tithes and offerings for the Temple and high priesthood. (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*).

Questions:

1. What questions remain for us regarding the text?
2. As it is read, what captures your attention?
3. Who is the modern day equivalent of the original audience? How do we cover the distance between ourselves and that audience?
4. What situation is being addressed and what is the modern day equivalent?
5. How has this passage traditionally been taught? What obstacles are present that stand against preaching the whole story here?

6. From a justice ministry perspective, what is God saying to our congregation in light of our local, national, global context?

Hello Friends. As we continue through Mark, chapter 8 begins a pivot in the movement of Jesus as He turns his attention toward Jerusalem. I hope you will join me Thursday and help me understand the justice implications of this particular passage. ~Adam Jones

NOTES VERSE BY VERSE

14 The disciples had forgotten to bring loaves, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.

Immediately following the feeding of 4000 with seven loaves, the conversation about "loaves" is not over. For Meyers, the plural "loaves" over against the one "loaf" holds the key to the passage. In the loaves feeding two alienated factions (Israelite villagers/Gentiles) are made one loaf. (Meyers 227)

15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

The yeast of the Pharisee is that renewal of God's people will come through purity, holding to their tradition line, and anyone claiming otherwise must be attested with validating signs. The yeast of Herod, as we read previously, offers the kingdom of God through cooperation with Rome and violent force. Both agree Jesus' kingdom movement is not the way. Over the course of the gospel, the disciples ask for seats of power, attempt to exclude persons from the movement, deny Jesus' death prediction, and ultimately desert him.

16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no loaves."

The disciples, often portrayed as models to follow and the primary focus of Mark, completely miss Jesus' statement and in turn the point of the wilderness feedings in general: the inclusion of peoples that are not Israelites.

17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no loaves? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"

18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

To the hearers of Mark, the voice of Moses rings clear asking the Israelites the same question in Deut. 29. Jesus is exasperated. This refrain is a repeated pattern throughout the history of God's people. God delivers, does wonders, people forget and miss the point. Horsley rightly argues that the disciples are in fact "foils" for Jesus and his kingdom movement.

19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

“Twelve,” they replied.

20 “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

He rehearses the wilderness feedings that just occurred, engaging the disciples in “remembering”.

21 He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

The conversation is left unresolved as the chapter proceeds. At this point in the narrative, we are left to wonder if the disciples will ever understand. In addition to the social boundaries that are crossed in the feedings, the disciples miss the abundance of God that Walter Brueggemann has laid out for us in his politically reading of the Exodus narrative. The narrative of scarcity may also be at work in the disciples, which opens the door to fear, and fuels a need for force/power to get things done.

Historical Context:

The people fed in the wilderness were deeply impoverished by the Roman Empire and those that colluded with it. “Rome took about 12 percent as a land tax, a denarius head tax on each member of the household, and a wave offering about 1/40th of the harvest, for a grand total of 15 percent. Add to this the 20 percent of the harvest set aside for sowing the next crop, and the peasant household is left with 65 percent of their subsistence crop, 55 percent if they tithe to the Temple and 45 percent if they pay a second tithe.” (David Fiensy, *Social History of Palestine*, 1991). Food was always short. And bread was a basic staple with deep historical meaning.

Each of the gospels narrates Jesus demonstrating his concern that the people have enough bread by feeding those around him who were hungry, thus also providing an important model for his followers to emulate. That is why when Jesus told his disciples to pray, “give us enough bread for the day;” it was a prayer for the end of Caesar’s kingdom, because by its very nature Caesar’s kingdom would never let there be enough bread for everyone. This was a basic fact of the political economy of Roman imperialism. (Obery Hendricks, *Which Jesus Shall We Teach?*)

Questions to Consider:

1. What situation/problem is being presented to Mark's audience? Is there a modern day equivalent?
2. What does this text communicate about discipleship and its role?
3. What insights can we glean from Brueggemann's work on Pharoah's narrative?
4. What is communicated about the work of justice?
5. How would you preach this text and what obstacles do we face?

Hello friends,

I hope you can join us again this Thursday at 10:30. I invite you to share your insights with us as we try to get better at proclaiming the gospel. I have so enjoyed our learning together.

Background:

“The Israelites were particularly hard for the Romans to pacify. Central to the identity of Jewish people was (and is) the story of the Exodus where God delivered the people from a brutal empire (Pharaoh). By the time of Jesus, people were increasingly expecting liberation from the Roman Empire just as they had been liberated from Egypt. The annual Passover celebration focused this unrest, especially in Jerusalem.

By the time of Jesus riots were such a regular feature of the season of Passover each year that the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate had begun to make it a practice every spring around Passover to leave his headquarters in Caesarea fifty miles away to the west and travel those fifty miles across the countryside and process through the streets of Jerusalem to his palace there.” (DART Text Study) Also, we must remember that the women of Mark lived in a patriarchal society and all that it entails. Women operated within fixed social boundaries that most often excluded access to basic needs and power apart from a man. Women were dominated by men and viewed as inferior at best or property at worst.

Mark 14:1-10

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; **2** for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

The Passover provides context for the rest of Mark. The chief priest and scribes feel particularly threatened as Roman partners. Passover recalls the exodus narrative in which imperial powers were overcome by a deliverer.

The power of the movement is acknowledged by its enemies, but public confrontation and arrest in the context of the political volatility of Passover, are bypassed for stealth.

3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

We cannot understate the power of Jesus welcoming a strange woman, acting apart from the patriarchal structure, intruding upon the “male leaders meeting” of the movement. And that meeting takes place in the house of one “unclean” leper, a social outsider.

The woman is acting in a prophetic role from Israelite tradition in which “kings” or “liberators” were anointed to free Israel from foreign oppression (Horsley, 217).

4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? **5** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her.

The disciples’ response is consistent with Jesus and the rich ruler. Their response again betrays “eyes that do not see” however and they “scold” the wrong person as with the children just before the rich young ruler.

6 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. **7** For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. **8** She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. **9** Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Jesus again scolds the disciples, having to clarify the meaning of the anointment.

The disciples, who cannot embrace or believe the impending death of Jesus, are contrasted with the woman who anticipates and prepares Jesus for that death.

Horsley notes that although “messiah” is not used, the woman’s act of service anticipates the messiah and prepares him for the final act.

The poor are assumed to always be with the disciples. Myers notes that Jesus affirms the ongoing responsibility to the poor, but the woman’s action is legitimized because it was done to him at this particular moment. (Myers 359)

Nowhere else in Mark is any person or action singled out like this to be remembered for all time.

A final note from Richard Horsley:

“If anything, Mark’s Gospel is a protest against the tendency for the leadership of Jesus’ movement to become figures of power and authority in imitation of models from the social-political order...In patriarchal society the only model of leadership in the village community is the male head of household. The only model of leadership beyond the local community is the people’s image of how their wealthy and powerful rulers operate.

It is precisely over against this hierarchical model of leadership that Mark presents the women as paradigms of 'following' Jesus and service in the movement."
(Horsley 228)

Sources: Richard Horsley, Hearing the Whole Story
Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man
DART Text Study, February 4, 2015

Questions:

1. How have you heard this taught or preached?
2. What piece of the text captures your attention?
3. How would you describe the situation/tension in this text?
4. What is Mark stating through the woman/disciples interplay?
5. What does Mark have to say about justice in this text?
6. In light of this, what current situations in our city, nation, or world are addressed in the text?