



PLYMOUTH READS
THE GOSPEL OF
MARK LENT 2024

Question MARK

A LENTEN STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK



Chapters Five and Six

This week's reading is action-packed. I'm imagining reading it with Batman-style comic bubbles above Jesus' head that say BAM! ZAP! POW!

CHAPTER FIVE begins with Jesus in a Gentile territory called the Decapolis (ten towns) which lie south and southwest of the Sea of Galilee. It's noteworthy that Jesus' healing and exorcism are not just for his own people, but for Gentiles as well. The man who is possessed by an unclean spirit acknowledges that there are, in fact, many spirits within him, and they are called Legion. (The same word used for a grouping of several thousand Roman soldiers. It is not accidental that a sign and symbol of Roman power is sent into swine.)

The afflicted man asks that Jesus send the spirits possessing him into the herd of pigs (unclean animals to Jews, okay with Gentiles), which Jesus does, and then the herd runs off a cliff and into the water. The swineherds (who just lost 2,000 animals) tell other Gentiles, who beg Jesus to leave...before they lose more livestock. The man now freed of demons asks to accompany Jesus, who refuses and asks him to share the good news among the Gentiles.

The chapter continues with the story of the healing (or raising) of the daughter of Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue. While Jesus is en route to the home of the ailing daughter, a woman with a hemorrhage approaches Jesus. It is important to note that her condition makes the woman ritual unclean and would have meant social exclusion. When she touches Jesus' garment two things happen: she is healed and Jesus senses that some of his power has been drained away. Jesus stops, inquires of the woman, sees her in her full personhood, and tells her that her trust in him has made her well.

They continue to journey to the home of Jairus, as people declare that there is nothing to be done, since the young girl is dead. After entering the house with his three closest disciples, Jesus commands the girl to get up, which she does. Jesus is replacing the key value of purity in his own faith with compassion. It is a key departure for Jesus and his followers.

CHAPTER SIX begins with Jesus preaching in the temple and the locals dismiss his teaching and his acts of power. He replies with "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown."

The next episode has Jesus commissioning the 12 disciples...sending them out on a mission to proclaim that people should change their hearts and minds (metanoia) and to heal the sick. The disciples travel in twos with no financial or physical support, except a staff.

The rather grisly and bizarre story of the beheading of John the Baptizer is told next, showing the moral bankruptcy, corruption, and caprice of the collaborating dynasty of Herod. Note that Jesus' public ministry begins in earnest after John's death.

Another major story follows in the gospel: The feeding of the five thousand. Five loaves and two fish are shared, satisfying the hunger of the crowd. When the baskets are passed back, more food is returned than was distributed in the first instance.

A further miracle story involving Jesus walking on the water to aid the disciples who are being tossed about in a fishing boat. Not only does Jesus still the storm, he encourages the disciples, telling them to take heart and not to be afraid. (That's a repeating refrain in the New Testament.) The chapter concludes with healings in Gennesaret, on the opposite end of the Sea of Galilee.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who would be upset that Jesus is healing the sick, exposing himself to unclean animals, expelling spirits, feeding the masses, and raising children from the dead? Why might they be upset? Why do you think Herodias wanted John to be executed?
2. The story of fives loaves and two fish is well known. What do you make of the story? Is it factually true, metaphorically true, or something else? What might it say to us today about sharing and feeding?

Putting It into Practice

Eating and feeding is a big deal in the New Testament. What is it okay to eat? Do new Christ-followers get to eat bacon and scallops? Who is it okay to eat with: sinners and tax collectors? What about the distribution of food to those who have too little? This week, how might you feed someone who needs to eat? Maybe help with Faith Family Hospitality network at Plymouth? Perhaps volunteer to make a meal for someone?



The mosaic above is from the sixth century (1,500 years ago) and is in the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy. One way to look at ancient Christian images is by asking three questions: Says – Meant – Means. What does this image depict or say? Why are people pictured the way they are? Can you find the component parts of the story? What might it have meant to the Christians who included it in a basilica in the western capital of the Roman Empire? What impression does the image leave you with? Does it amplify or underscore parts of the story for you? What does that impression mean?

Resources

Mark's Gospel: [Common English Bible](#)

Mark's Gospel: [New Revised Standard Version](#)

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