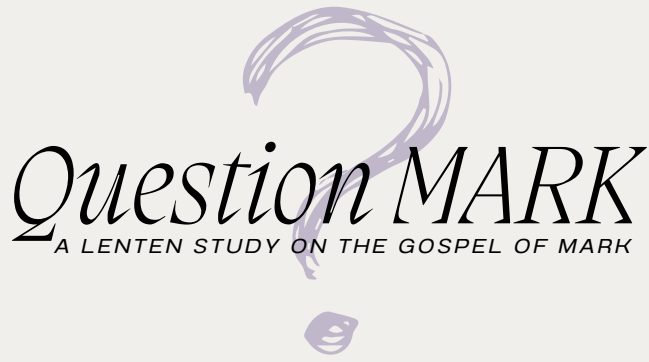




PLYMOUTH READS  
THE GOSPEL OF  
MARK LENT 2024



### **Background: Why read a 2,000 story?**

The Gospel of Mark is the briefest and earliest of the four canonical gospels (those in our Bible). It is likely to have been written during or shortly after the Roman Empire's First Jewish War (ended in 70 AD), when the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

Scholars don't actually know who wrote Mark's gospel; the name was attached to the work in the second century.

A gospel is a distinct literary form: it isn't a simple biography or story, but rather seeks to proclaim good news (euaggelion in Greek, evangelium in Latin, and godspel in Old English). Unlike a historical account, a gospel is an interpretive account, offering example and instruction about following Jesus and ways of living as a disciple. The authors of Luke's and Matthew's gospels used Mark's gospel as one of their sources.

Why read this gospel? It's one of the earliest accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus, and that is important to us as people who try to follow in his way.

### **Week One: Chapters One and Two**

The Gospel of Mark opens not with a birth narrative, but with the proclamation of John the Baptizer and with Jesus' own baptism by John in the River Jordan, which concludes with the voice of God identifying Jesus as his son, the Beloved.

Verses 12 and 13 tell the whole story of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, which we remember each Lent. Verse 14 begins Jesus' ministry and his own pronouncement that the kingdom of God has come near, so the followers are to change their hearts and minds (the Greek is metanoia) and trust the good news. In verse 16, Jesus calls his first disciples, who leave their fishing nets and their families to follow him.

Healing stories begin in Chapter 1 with Jesus expelling the unclean spirit and with multiple healings at the home of Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. As chapter 1 turns toward chapter 2, Jesus heals a leper, the paralyzed man.

Jesus dines with Levi the tax collector and sinners, and the Pharisees (scholars of the law) object to him eating with those whom others reject. We learn that John the Baptizer's disciples and the Pharisees observe the fast, while Jesus and his followers. And Jesus seemingly breaks the law of the sabbath, concluding with "The sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the sabbath."

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## Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you suppose there are so many healing stories about Jesus at the outset of Mark's gospel? What do they tell you about Jesus and why people would follow him? What does healing mean in the broadest sense, beyond physical curing?
2. What do you make of Jesus' violating the purity laws by eating with sinners and tax collectors? What about his seeming disregard for the longstanding observation of the sabbath? If he is neglecting such pieces of law, what is his motivation, and what does he emphasize instead?

## Putting it into Practice

In addition to a physical cure, healing can mean a lot of different things: being welcomed into a group when others reject you, learning to live with a disease, knowing in your soul that you are deeply loved. In Hebrew, the phrase "tikkun olam" means healing the world. This week, how can you work to bring healing to someone through an act of compassion?



The winged lion is the symbol of the Gospel of Mark, an image that still occurs in art and architecture. The four symbols — Mark the lion, Matthew the human, Luke the ox, John the eagle — derive from Revelation 4.7. Basilica San Marco in Venice is purported to have the bones of Mark the evangelist, and so the winged lion pictured here is the symbol of the City of Venice. The open book says, "Peace be with you, Mark my evangelist."

What images does the winged lion conjure in your imagination?

## Resources

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

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

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