

# **Mark**

## **Session 2**

### **Community**

**(Mark 4:35-8:26)**

**HEARING MARK  
A LISTENER'S GUIDE**

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With additional material from:

**AUGSBURG COMMENTARY ON  
THE NEW TESTAMENT  
MARK**

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- ❖ Indicates material is from Malbon
- ◆ Indicates material is from Juel

# COMMUNITY

## MARK 4:35-8:26

- ❖ After proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus initiates a core community by calling disciples
- ❖ What are the boundaries of that community?
- ❖ This part of Mark reads like a travelogue with travel alternating between Jewish and Gentile regions
- ❖ Galilee is practically surrounded by Gentile areas

# First Journey (Mark 4:35-6:44)

## Stilling the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

- ❖ Begins in Jewish territory on the Sea of Galilee with terrified disciples and a sleeping Jesus
- ♦ Contrast the terror of the disciples while Jesus sleeps with Jesus' pleas while the disciples sleep in the garden of Gethsemane
- ❖ When awakened, Jesus says, "Peace be still." And the storms cease
- ♦ Jesus rebukes the wind as in an exorcism, and the winds obey
- ♦ Water has deep roots as a chaos symbol in the Bible (Job 38:1-11, Psalm 74:13-14, Psalm 107:23-29, Psalm 106:9, Psalm 114:3-4)
- ❖ For Jesus, the issue is the disciples' lack of trust when they are witnesses to the inauguration of the kingdom of God

- ❖ For the disciples, the issue is, “Who is Jesus?”, who can exert this kind of control over the elements of nature
- ❖ One of Mark’s techniques is to raise questions that are not answered in the text, intending them for the audience
- ❖ Note that at creation, God gave dominion over the land to people, but retained dominion over the sea for himself

## Casting Out Demons (Mark 5:1-20)

- ❖ Once on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee, a man with an unclean spirit meets them
- Note how at the beginning of this scene, Jesus is crossing numerous boundaries
  - A Gentile land
  - An unclean spirit
  - A herd of swine
- ❖ The unclean spirit questions Jesus' business there, saying, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"
- ❖ And Jesus asks his name
- Knowing the name of a demon was thought to give power over the demon
- ❖ The response is a joke; their name is legion like the Roman legion
- ❖ The Roman legion is like the unclean spirit; it is demonic

- ♦ Roman legions stationed in Palestine used standards with a wild boar on them
- ❖ Knowing they will be cast out of the man, the demons negotiate a deal with Jesus to be sent into a nearby herd of swine, who promptly rush down the hillside and drown themselves in the sea
- ♦ Note the comedy here, the unclean spirit(s) ask for God's protection against Jesus (v. 7)
- ❖ Jesus' presence on the Gentile side is just as disruptive as on the Jewish side; the Gerasenes demand that Jesus leave
- ♦ "What is frightening about Jesus is that he refuses to leave the world as it is. He transgresses the boundaries and rescues those beyond help."
- ❖ The healed man begs to go with Jesus, but Jesus instructs him to go home and tell his family and friends "and tell them how much the Lord has done for you"

- ❖ So off to the Decapolis goes the healed man to tell "how much Jesus had done for him"
- ❖ Mark is saying Jesus is Lord

## Healing a Woman and a Girl (Mark 5:21-43)

- ❖ Back on the Jewish side of the sea, Jesus is met by Jairus, a leader of the synagogue
- ♦ First time a bona fide religious official interacts with Jesus in a non-confrontational way
- ❖ In the middle of a large crowd, Jesus consents to go with Jairus to heal his daughter who is at the point of death
- ❖ Also in the crowd is a woman suffering with a hemorrhage for 12 years
- ❖ Trusting that she will be healed if she only touches the hem of Jesus clothes, she does so and is healed
- ♦ Notes that Mark and Luke are unconcerned with Jesus' power being accessed without deliberate action on Jesus' part
- ❖ Sensing the outflow of power, Jesus asks, "Who touched me?"

- ❖ The disciples are chagrined at this question when they look around them at the crowd
- ❖ The woman responds to Jesus' question and Jesus commends her faith, calling her daughter and thus restoring her to community (Leviticus 15:25-30)
- ❖ Jairus receives word that his daughter has died
- ❖ Despite protests, Jesus insists on visiting the girl, exhorting the father to have faith
- ❖ With the parents and 3 disciples, Jesus passes through a group of professional mourners who laugh at him
- ◆ Literally, Jesus throws out the mourners
- ❖ To the little girl, Jesus speaks in Aramaic, "Talitha cum" or "Little girl, get up" and requests that she be given something to eat
- ◆ Use of Aramaic gives Mark's gospel authenticity and a hint of mystery

- ❖ “He strictly ordered them that no one should know this”
- Juel sees the tension that results as similar to the ending of the gospel
- ❖ Can this secret be kept? No, like the new wine in old wineskins, it will break out of its container
- ❖ Another sandwich
  - Mark 5:21-24      Jairus requests that his daughter be healed
  - Mark 5:25-34      healing of the hemorrhaging woman (Jesus’ daughter)
  - Mark 5:35-43      raising of Jairus’ daughter
- ❖ Stories are linked by theme of 12 years and by the faith required for healing
- ❖ Both women have their life-giving capacities restored to them

## Jesus in His Hometown (Mark 6:1-6a)

- ❖ Jesus returns to his hometown
- ❖ Note carefully the questions the people ask
  - “Where did this man get all this?”
  - “What is this wisdom that has been given to him?”
  - “What deeds of power are being done by his hands!”
  - “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”
- Son of Mary implies that Jesus is illegitimate; it is a slur used by the villagers
- ❖ Jesus probably quotes a proverb, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown”
- ❖ Then we are told that Jesus “could do no deed of power there” and that Jesus is amazed at their unbelief

## **Sending Out the Twelve (Mark 6:6b-13)**

- ❖ The twelve disciples are now sent out to the surrounding villages by twos with authority over unclean spirits
- ❖ Their instructions include what not to take (bread, bag, money) and what to take (a staff, sandals, and 1 tunic only)
- ♦ Jesus' instruction to shake the dust off their feet prepares the disciples for rejection
- ❖ Their message is the same as that of John the Baptist, "Repent"
- ❖ They cast out demons and heal the sick by anointing them with oil

## Death of John (Mark 6:14-29)

- ❖ King Herod hears about the activities of Jesus and his disciples and he becomes concerned that this is John the Baptist come back to life
- ❖ Then we're told about John's death
- ❖ John is imprisoned because he offended Herod's wife, Herodias, who had previously been married to Herod's brother, Philip
- ♦ According to Josephus, John's arrest had political overtones
- ♦ Herod's first wife was from the neighboring kingdom of Nabatea; King Aretas of Nabatea waged war against Herod because of the divorce
- ❖ Then we learn that although Herod is confused by John, he likes to listen to John
- ❖ John's demise comes because of a birthday party, Herod's, at which Herod's stepdaughter dances

- ❖ Herod is so pleased that in front of all the celebrants he says, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."
- There's another king who said this, King Ahasuerus (Esther 5:3, 7:2) and he is a buffoon
- Also like Esther, this narrative involves death, in this case the death of John
- ❖ John's disciples, on hearing about the death of their rabbi, take John's body away for burial

## Return of the Twelve (Mark 6:30)

- ❖ Another sandwich or A-B-A pattern
  - Sending out of the disciples
  - John's death
  - Return of the disciples
  
- ❖ John
  - Preaches
  - Arrested
  - Killed
  
- ❖ Jesus
  - Preaches
  - Rejected
  - ?
  
- ❖ Disciples
  - Preach
  - ?
  - ?

## Feeding Five Thousand Mark 6:31-44)

- ❖ In an effort to get away from the crowds, Jesus and the disciples get into a boat, and discover the crowds meet them on the wilderness shore
- ❖ Jesus has compassion on the crowds and teaches them because they are like “sheep without a shepherd”
- ♦ The biblical basis for the image of God as shepherd can be found in Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34
- ❖ Before long, it’s late and the people are hungry
- ❖ The disciples demand that Jesus send the crowds away, but Jesus tells the disciples to feed the people
- ❖ The disciples protest that they can’t afford to buy food for all the people (200 denarii = 200 days’ wages)

- Compare the disciples' question with Moses' question in Numbers 11:22
- ❖ Jesus brings the disciples down to earth asks them what food they have - 5 loaves & 2 fish
- ❖ Jesus takes the loaves, blesses the loaves, breaks the loaves and gives the loaves to be distributed
- ❖ When all the people are full, the disciples pick up 12 baskets of leftovers
- ❖ All 5000 people are fed in the wilderness
- Compare what Jesus does here with Elijah in 2 Kings 4:42-44

## Second Journey (Mark 6:45-8:26)

### Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45-52)

- ❖ Jesus has the disciples take the boat to Bethsaida while he dismisses the crowds and spends time in prayer
- ❖ Because of the wind, the boat is not making much progress, so Jesus walks out to meet them with the intention of passing by them
- ❖ Mistaking him for a ghost, the disciples become fearful
- ❖ To calm their fears, Jesus says, "Take heart, I am"
- ❖ In Exodus, this is the name that God uses to identify himself to Moses at the burning bush
- ❖ Jesus got into the boat with them and the wind stopped

- ❖ “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”
  
- ❖ Who else had a hardened heart? Pharoah
  
- ❖ Here is the exodus all over again
  - People are fed in the wilderness
  - Winds and the sea lead to people using the sea like a highway
  - Hardened hearts

## Healing Many (Mark 6:53-56)

- ❖ The disciples, headed for Bethsaida, have managed to land in Gennesaret
- ❖ Jesus heals many people who touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak

## Challenging Tradition (Mark 7:1-13)

- ❖ Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem noticed that Jesus and his disciples did not follow the washing ritual before eating
- ❖ This is not about hygiene, but about keeping sacred and profane spaces separate
- ♦ Keeping the law was a measure of holiness and life-sustaining (Exodus 30:19)
- ❖ Mark's explanation here suggests that Mark's community included people who were not familiar with Jewish ritual practices
- ❖ The question of the scribes, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders?"
- ♦ The tradition of the elders is oral law, considered to be equal in validity to the Torah according to rabbinic authorities
- ♦ Intent of this oral law does not reflect undue concern with minutia, but is an effort to acknowledge God in every aspect of life

- ♦ “Washing of hands is a mark of respect for every aspect of God’s created order; it signals the desire to bring mealtime under the sacred canopy of the Torah.”
- ❖ Is answered by Jesus retort that they are “teaching human precepts as doctrines”
- ♦ Jesus’ response here is based on Isaiah 29:13 (in LXX)
- ❖ Then Jesus gives a specific example of a human doctrine that is used to work around God’s commandment to honor ones parents
- ❖ However, we have no information that such a doctrine or practice actually existed, in fact, written material in the Mishnah, agrees in substance with Jesus’ interpretation
- ♦ Problem here is not tradition per se, but the use of tradition to appear faithful while actually opposing God
- ♦ Jesus is not the only Jew who questions oral law’s authority; the Sadducees not only

reject the oral law, but all writings other than the Torah

- Notes that table fellowship issues will loom large in the early church as seen in Acts and the letters of Paul

## Inside Out (Mark 7:14-23)

- ❖ Calling for the crowd's attention, Jesus says, "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."
- ❖ Once again, the disciples get the inside scoop, followed by Mark's comment to the audience that Jesus "declared all foods clean" this way
- ❖ Jesus expresses dismay that the disciples are like the crowds in their lack of understanding
- ❖ This section ends with Jesus' plain statement that the evil intentions of our hearts are what defile us, whether Jew or Gentile
- ♦ "For Judaism..., the relationship with God and the world is mediated by the Torah, understood as a structure that orders all of life in terms of holiness. For Jesus' followers, the relationship with God and the

world is mediated by Jesus, whose desire to heal and to save acknowledges no boundaries.

## Healing Another Daughter (Mark 7:24-30)

- ❖ Jesus and the disciples make another attempt to get away from the crowds by going to Tyre
- ❖ Even here, a Syrophenician woman comes to ask for healing for her daughter
- ❖ Then a Jesus we don't know says, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."
- ♦ "As the sacred food was intended for men, but not for the dogs, the Torah was intended to the[sic] given to the Chosen People, but not to the Gentiles." Babylonian Talmud
- ♦ Paul expresses thoughts similar to Jesus in Romans 1:16
- ❖ Implied here is that the Jews are children and this woman and her child are dogs

- ❖ So the woman engages with Jesus with this witty repartee, “Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”
- ❖ Jesus praises the woman and declares her daughter healed
- ❖ Malbon sees this as Jesus learning about community and inclusion, having ears to hear

## Healing a Deaf Man (Mark 7:31-37)

- ❖ This section begins with strange geography- Jesus goes north to Sidon in order to go south to the Decapolis
- ❖ In the Decapolis, a deaf man is brought to Jesus for healing
- ♦ Wording of this story is especially close to the healing of the blind man (Mark 8:22-26)
- ❖ Jesus heals him by using Gentile techniques, but he does so in private away from the crowds
- ❖ Jesus uses an Aramaic word, ephphatha
- ❖ Jesus' native language has power in Gentile territory
- ❖ Once again, Jesus orders those who know to keep this healing a secret, but the more they are cautioned the "more zealously they proclaimed it"

- ♦ Notes that some interpreters think that the point of requiring silence is a way to guarantee that the good news gets spread
- ❖ Their proclamation - "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."
- ❖ Here in Gentile territory, the people are taking Jewish messianic expectations and applying them to Jesus

## Feeding Four Thousand (Mark 8:1-9)

- ❖ Even in Gentile territory, Jesus is followed by crowds who listen to his teaching for days at a time
- ❖ Jesus is concerned that if he sends the people away, they will faint on their travels home
- ❖ The disciples respond, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?"
- ♦ Notes that this is a point of laughter for people reading or listening to the entire gospel
- ❖ So where were these disciples a few crowds back....
- ❖ Again, Jesus asks the disciples what food is available; the answer, 7 loaves
- ❖ Jesus takes the loaves, blesses the loaves, breaks the loaves, and gives the loaves

- ❖ We will hear these words one last time, at the Last Supper
- ❖ These are the words of Communion
- ❖ Once again, the people eat until filled and there are leftovers, 7 baskets
- ❖ Here in Gentile territory, that's a lot of crumbs, enough for everyone

## Refusing a Request for a Sign (Mark 8:10-12)

- ❖ Jesus and the disciples get back in the boat and head for Dalmanutha, a Jewish region
- ❖ Here the Pharisees ask Jesus to give them a "sign from heaven"
- ❖ Jesus sighs, asking why they need a sign, and says there will be no sign
- ♦ "This generation has eyes, but it cannot see what is being enacted before its face."
- ❖ Malbon calls Jesus an ambiguous Messiah

## Questions on the Sea (Mark 8:13-21)

- ❖ Back in the boat, Jesus and the disciples have bread on their minds
- ❖ The disciples have forgotten to bring bread and so have only one loaf with them
- ❖ Jesus warns the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees
- ❖ The disciples are thinking, "He knows we forgot the bread."
- ❖ Jesus expresses dismay at the lack of understanding by the disciples; Are their hearts hardened?
- ❖ They have eyes, but don't see; they have ears, but don't hear
- Sees echoes of Isaiah here
- ❖ So the disciples get a pop quiz
  - How many leftovers after feeding the 5000? 12 baskets

- How many leftovers after feeding the 4000? 7 baskets
  
- ❖ Numbers are important here
  - 12 is the number for Jews, 12 tribes, 12 disciples, a woman suffering for 12 years, a little girl of 12 years
  - 7 is the number of the other nations, 70 nations according to Jewish thought of the times, 7 days of the week, 7 planetary deities, 7 seas, 7 continents, 7 hills of Rome

## Reviewing Mark 4:35-8:22a - Journeys and Community

- ❖ Jesus' question, "Do you not yet understand?" Is another unanswered question that is for the audience
- ❖ Jesus heals, feeds, and teaches both Jews and Gentiles, both insiders and outsiders
- ❖ The disciples, though heading for Gentile Bethsaida wind up in Jewish Gennesaret, symbolic of their inability to break boundaries
- ❖ But Jesus can lead the disciples to Bethsaida
- ❖ There, with Jesus, they heal Gentiles, feed Gentiles and teach Gentiles

## Healing a Blind Man (Mark 8:22-26)

- ❖ In Bethsaida, a blind man is brought to Jesus for healing
- ❖ Jesus uses saliva to touch the man's eyes, an action that results in a partial healing
- ❖ With a second touch, there is complete healing
- ❖ The now seeing blind man is admonished sternly not just to keep silence, but to go home without returning to the village
- ❖ This healing story is unique to Mark
- ❖ Like the blind man, the disciples have partial vision, partial hearing; they envision restoration for Jews but not for Gentiles
- ♦ Notes that Peter's confession later is also a two-stage process
- ♦ "However much Peter and the rest fail to grasp, there is an implied promise that Jesus will finish what he began. Nothing is

hidden except to be revealed. What Jesus plants will bear fruit.”

## Reviewing Mark 4:35-8:26 - Community

- ❖ In Mark's gospel, the Jewish areas are bounded by water, the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River
- ❖ For the disciples, these boundaries pose genuine difficulties
- ❖ The disciples have trouble crossing the sea even with a boat
- ❖ Whether on sea or land, Jesus acts with the power of God
  - On the sea, to still the waves and wind
  - On the land, to provide food for many with little
- ❖ Mark wrote for a community that had internalized the boundaries between Jew and Gentile
- ❖ What are the boundaries that divide our community?

- ❖ Where is our vision partial and in need of additional healing?