



lifegroup

resource guide

for the week of 24 September

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.’”*

The Gospel according to Mark 1.1-3

The saint who first found grace to pen

The life which was the Life of men

(Laurence Housman)

The Gospel According to Mark may well be the most important book ever written. As far as we can tell it was the first Christian book written and circulated about the life of Jesus and it served as a model for its two “big brothers,” Matthew and Luke. The gospel is not for the sedentary of heart. It is for the adventurous who want to run a race that will keep step with Jesus. Its high-tension narrative carries the reader with it and leaves us often breathless with Jesus’ forceful decisions, quick actions, realistic responses to threatening situations, and the eventual climax in Jerusalem where the high point of the drama is reached. If you read the gospel in one sitting, you may well feel caught up with the rapid pace of Jesus’ activity and experience the disciples’ exhaustion. Mark alone explains what is obvious to his audience, “Many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” (6.31)

Mark’s gospel presents many themes that are designed to speak relevantly to believers during turbulent times. But most of all it should be read as an invitation to follow the one who is both Lord and Savior. We are presented with a portrait of a disciple as one

- _ called by Jesus
- _ called by grace not qualifications
- _ called to Jesus
- _ called to obey
- _ called to serve
- _ called to suffer

It issues us a challenge to keep pace with Jesus. When we read this gospel we discover that discipleship is nothing short of a marathon that begins in Galilee and ends in Jerusalem— only to begin again on Easter Sunday with the women running and Jesus going before them all to Galilee. Discipleship is not for the half-hearted. Nor is it for those who already perceive themselves fit. Mark summons the “faith- hearted” to keep step with Jesus. His presentation is compelling to the man or woman who is willing to project themselves into the center of the narrative and run the course afresh.

Yet the challenge has a cost. “When Christ calls a man he bids them to come and die.”¹ We can only follow Jesus at a personal cost. Lasting victory always lies on the other side of Calvary. Triumph can only be secured through the tragedy at Golgotha. Still, if the cost is great, the aims, privileges and reward are infinitely greater. Mark encourages us that the disciple is “no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”² F. R. Maltby used to say that Jesus promised his disciples three things: they would be absurdly happy, completely fearless, and in constant trouble! Mark paints a multi-colored portrait that captures a disciple’s life with Jesus. Like contrasting shades of light and darkness flecked together we see joy and pain, glory and agony, rejoicing and weeping, life and death. In the words of William Blake:

*Joy and woe are woven fine
A clothing for the soul divine.*

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better...

What is the most surprising discovery you have made when you were growing up? How did that affect you?

Mark 15:40-16:20: The Good News of God

Mark 15:40 ¶ There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

42 When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

1 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. 2 Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. 3 They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. 5 On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. 6 He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. 7 But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'" 8 Then they went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

When he had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

12 After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. 13 They returned and told the others; but they did not believe them either.

14 [But] later, as the eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised. 15 He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they

will speak new languages. 18 They will pick up serpents [with their hands], and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. 20 But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

NOTE: there are 3 questions we are always interacting with when we read and reflect on the Bible.

1) *What* (does the Bible say)?

2) *Now what* (should/will I think about)?

3) *So what* (difference should that make in how I live)?

This year we will be organizing the Resource Guide around these 3 questions.

What? (does the Bible say)

What is significant about the people present for Jesus' burial?

What do verses 42–47 tell us about Joseph?

How do the women respond to what they see and hear?

What does this longer ending (vs 9-10) tell us about how early Christians saw the events of Easter and their significance?

Why are the signs of 16.17-18 important? See Luke 10.19; Acts 2; 3.1-10; 5.12-16; 28.1-5

What are the similarities between this longer ending and the endings of Matthew (28.16-20) and Luke (24.44-49)?

Now what? (should/will I think based on what this passage says)

What risks does Joseph run by taking responsibility for Jesus' burial?

In the ancient world women were regarded as worthless witnesses. Why does Mark's mention of them here actually affirm the validity of this story rather than call the events into question?

Read v 14. Notice the authority given by Jesus to human testimony about Him. How do you feel when you consider that people will be judged based on how they respond to your testimony?

What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection for you? How would Christianity be different if there was no resurrection?

So what? (difference will this passage make in how I live)

What tasks has our risen Lord given you in order to take the gospel into all the world?

Do you think every follower of Jesus – including you!– is commissioned to share their faith? Why or why not?

Do YOU feel commissioned by the risen Jesus to share your faith? Why or why not?

What holds you back from sharing your faith? What inhibits you from inviting others to Faith?

How can your LifeGroup encourage you to share your faith?

What might your LifeGroup do together to create an opportunity to share your (collective) faith?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...

For further reading on the Gospel of Mark:

The Message of Mark by Donald English, Intersity Press, 1992

Mark by R. Alan Cole (Tyndale New Testament Commentary), IVP Academic, 2008

Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is Good News & What Makes It Good by N. T. Wright and James Langton, Harper One, 2017