**Midrashing Mark**

*Welcome to another Series of Midrash!*

This Fall, we will be spending time with the Gospel of Mark, both in Sunday Worship and KidZone, and in our congregational discernment process called “Vision 2020”. Mark’s Gospel has lots of challenges (we’ll find out what some of those are as we explore further), but one thing Mark is clear on – God has a Dream for the people of God. Mark’s Jesus calls this “the Kingdom of God”, and he repeatedly told his followers, “the Kingdom of God is here, now, close, already.” We will explore what that Dream was, is, and could be for us, as well as for Mark’s first hearers and readers.

“Midrash” – we’ll explain this in more detail in Session one, but in a nutshell, “Midrash” means to search, study, prod and poke, notice and mind the gaps, follow rabbit trails of verses or words that intrigue, and bring our imagination into the conversation with that of Mark the Gospeller, sometimes creating our own stories to fill in those gaps.

You can participate in this course in a number of ways: I will be offering the same session twice each week:

a) Wednesday evenings 7:30 to 9:15 pm OR

b) Thursday mornings 9:15 to 10:45 am OR/AND

c) You can also keep up via the CPU blog: ‘BeyondWoodandStone’ – [http://cpuc.edublogs.org/Midrashing Mark/](http://cpuc.edublogs.org/Midrashing%20Mark/) (blog posts will be updated on Fridays)

**SCHEDULE OUTLINE**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Topic Focus | Biblical Text |
| Week1  Wed Sept 19, Thur Sept 20 | Mark the Gospeller | Mark 1-16  (Mark 8:22-38) |
| Week 2  Sept 26/27 | Discipleship sticking points | Mark 9:38-50 (Sept 30)  (Mark 10:1-12) |
| Week 3  Oct 3 / 4 | How many are fed? | Mark 6:34-44; 8 :1-10  (Oct 7 T/Giving) |
| Week 4  Oct 10/11 | Camels and things  Claims on the Pew | Mark 10:17-31 (Oct 14)  Mark 10:35-45 (Oct 21) |

**Session 1 Outline**

1. General Introductions

2. Midrash? Product and Process

3. Mark, the Gospel.

**1. General Introductions**

- Who are we all? Why are we here? What do we hope to gain from the experience?

- Creating safe space and welcome

- General Course introduction

**2. Midrash = ??**

**דרש =**  derash – to seek, study, inquire, probe, pursue.

It can also imply either a Product or a Process. We will be focussing most of our attention on process not product.

**Midrash as Product**

Midrashim are stories about the stories in the Bible.

Jewish tradition has collected and compiled midrashim over the centuries. The first Midrashim are in the Bible itself. The Jewish Tradition has created a vast library of interpretive texts about the Bible as it meets the changing circumstances of the community and culture, some of which are “midrashic” interpretations.

Torah – Oral Torah – Mishnah + Gemara = Talmuds (Babylonian/Palestinian) + Midrash Rabbah, Midrash Halakah, Midrash Haggadah.

**Midrash as Process**

For much of Jewish and Christian history, the Bible has been seen as a text open to infinite interpretation.

*Rabbi Ben Bag Bag* (1-200 CE)

On reading Torah: “Turn it, and turn it again, or all is in it; and contemplate it, and grow grey and old over it, and stir not from it, for you can have no better rule/way of life than this. (*Avot 5:26*)

*Marc Gellman*(20th C)

“Explaining stories from the Bible only makes sense if there is just one right way to understand that story. But the stories in the Bible are so rich and deep and packed with a thousand different meanings that they cannot be explained just one right way. The best way to understand a story in the Bible is to make up another story about it.

*(Does God Have a Big Toe?)*

**“Texts and Textures”**

Some general working assumptions about Scripture for this course:

* It is a human text, compiled over thousands of years, in multiple locations, by multiple authors (i.e. it is multivalent)
* It was compiled for a ‘sacred purpose’ – a window into God’s character and desire.
* What makes a text “sacred” is how it connects the holy with the lived experience of those who read/study it
* Texts are meant to transcend time, ‘capturing’ the ephemeral’ of one generation to be shared with subsequent ones.

Texture

* When an ancient text is met in a new context = texture!
* Some texts are interpreted in later texts (e.g. Genesis 1-2), Matthew as interpreter of Mark
* Ancient texts take on new meaning when interpreted in successive generations, or different cultural locations.

**Getting Midrashic** There are many ways to use a midrashic imagination to read and interpret a Biblical text. So many it can be overwhelming, so we will use a 5 point method throughout this course, so that we can get a feel for doing this ourselves, and to modify and adapt as we become more familiar with the process.

1. Hearing and Marking the text
2. Mind the gap – what’s missing, what don’t you know?
3. Texts in Contexts: Who can help mind the gap?

Which community wrote it?

Which communities passed it on?

What other communities have read?

What community (individual) is reading it now?

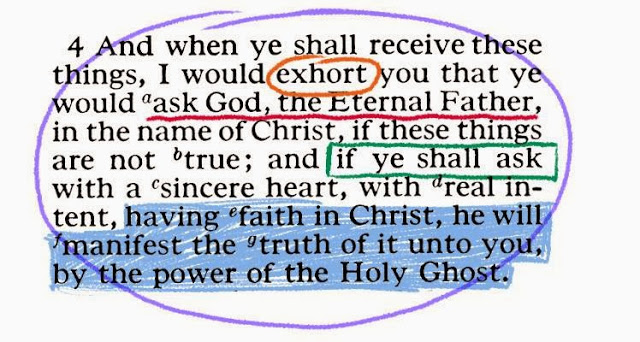
1. Follow the Rabbit – what intrigues you enough to follow it?
2. (re)Tell the Story
   * Stories within the story
   * Stories beyond the story
   * What story would you tell?

**1. Hearing and Marking the Text**

* “Hearing” a text is closest to the original practice of the Judeo-Christian communities. Many biblical texts are written to be heard
* As literate, visual people, “marking” a text helps some of us to ‘hear’ better.
* Colours?
* Underlines, circling words
* Punctuations: \* ? !

What stands out? What is puzzling? What feels personal? What provokes a strong reaction (what reaction?)

Following a trail – is there a repeated word or concept you want to follow (e.g. …..



**2. Mind the Gap**

This step helps us to realize that we have a partial written record, that even though this is “Scripture”, it’s incomplete, imperfect.

It also gives us permission to demand things of the text that it may not be able to deliver… we become its conversation partner rather than merely its consumer/recipient.

* Where are you missing information/narrative/detail you wish you could have?
* Is there a fact gap you want to fill?

**3. Texts in Contexts**

How can I find out more about the communities that produced and interpreted the text, when I don’t have a Theology degree, nor access to Rev. Elisabeth’s library?!

Even if you don’t know the answers to the questions for this step, even asking them serves as a reminder that the texts we read are

a) written after the events they record

b) by an author (or authors) *for* a particular community, and with a particular perspective guiding their writing

c) that other communities received the texts and chose to pass them down to the next generation

d) that we too read *in community*, as well as individuals.

e) that the texts are communications – attempts to convey.

**4. Follow the Rabbit.**

What one element of the text intrigues you enough to follow it wherever it leads you, leaving the rest behind?

You are encouraged to have questions, to niggle, wrestle or PLAY with those questions.

It may be unique to you; that’s okay!

5. **(re)Tell the Story**

This part is often the most daunting, but also the most ‘engaging’ part of midrashic imagination. The head and heart come together and play with the text, flesh it out, fill in gaps, add colour and tone, drama or depth.

When we engage in retelling, we are in a creative process; we begin to internalize and integrate some aspect of the text into our lives. It has left the bondage to the page and taken up residence in your world. It has become a lively text.

**Midrashing a Marken text 8:22-30**

# 

**22**They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. **23**He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” **24**And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” **25**Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. **26**Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

**27**Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” **28**And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” **29**He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” **30**And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. (NRSV)

**3. Mark as Gospel**

What do we know? (Any insights are important! Be prepared to share and explore)

* Who was “Mark”?
* What is a “Gospel” anyway?
* When did the Gospel get written?
* Why? What narrative choices can we discern?
* What’s happened to it since?
  + Matthew and Luke
  + Post Biblical “life of Mark”

For your own Notes:

The Gospels didn’t get names until some time in the second century C.E. as a way to distinguish between the four Gospels in the canon, and those that were in circulation outside the Bible. We don’t know who Mark was, but he was not a life-time companion of Jesus.

“Gospel” = Ευαγγέλιον (evangelion) is a word used in Greco-Roman times to refer to a missive sent to report a (military) victory. It means “Good News” – and is often translated in contemporary English Bibles as “Gospel” or “Good News”.

**Mark as a Gospel**

* is the first Gospel in our Bible to have been written (not Matthew).
  + likely written 69-70 C.E.
* is the first “Narrative Gospel.” (Likely written like Greco-Roman popular literature (e.g. Chariton, Xenophon).
* Previous/earlier writings include some of Paul’s letters, and other non-biblical texts which were collected “Sayings” of Jesus.
* is the shortest Gospel.
* has no Nativity story. No childhood of Jesus stories. No resurrection appearances of Jesus. No Lord’s Prayer. Far fewer parables than Luke or Matthew (no Prodigal, Good Samaritan). No autobiographical declarations of Jesus as “Son of God” or “Messiah” (though there is the self- reference to “Son of Man/ Human One”)

**Mark as a Narrative**

Different scholars come up with different ‘divisions’ to the story, but the one that makes most sense to me is this:

A Prologue Mark 1: 1-15

Part 1: Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee Mark 1 - 8

Part 2: The Journey to Jerusalem Mark 9 - 11

Part 3: The Last week Mark 11- 16

It is a simple narrative plot structure and one that is found in Markan contemporary Koine Greek popular stories, e.g. by Chariton and Xenophon.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Transfiguration scene (9:2-8) acts as the pivotal turning point of the narrative. The final section is fully 40% of the entire book, and gives the Gospel a distinctly “passion-oriented” tone. Journey motifs and repetitions serve as episode markers. Imagine the telling of this Gospel in its entirety as an oral/aural event, and you’ll start to hear clues to these forward shifts in the story.

**Mark’s “character”**

* “Immediately” – a palpable sense of urgency
* is it a “War” Gospel?
* the “kingdom of God “ is here/close/imminent/immanent
* Jesus as teacher, healer, and exorcist
* the Son of Man/Human One
* the “Messianic Secret” motif
* the panoptical (omniscient) lens of the narrator
* the clueless disciples
* fear and failure of the disciples
* the missing resurrection (and the redactive solutions)
* the dramatic irony (who knows what?)

**Mark’s Message?**

There is an evident simple message, but then the layers go deeper and deeper…..

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God. (Mark1:1) This is how he lived, how he died, and now “he has gone ahead of us into Galilee” (Mark 16: there to meet us on the Way until time and the eschaton is accomplished (soon)…. except…..

**For Next Time**

Before you look at what’s next. Take a few moments to jot down in this space some reflections, ahas, quandaries or new insights you have gained from this first session.

+++++

FOR WEEK 2

*To help prepare for that session:*

1. You may want to ‘fill in the gap’ between Chapter 8 and next week’s Lectionary selection at 9:38. Read and mark any questions you may have.

2. Pre-read **Mark 9:38-50** You can use this software to read and compare a number of different versions. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

2. Try completing steps 1 – 3 of our Midrashic method.

3. For personal reflection:*choose one of the following 2 options to ponder:*

a) What are your own personal “discipleship sticking points”? (e.g. I am glad I can be a follower of the Way of Jesus, but when he said ………, I’m afraid I just can’t go there) As you think of this question, be aware of what you’re prepared to share in a safe group, and what you may want to keep to yourself (for now!)

b) What “stumbling blocks” do you see being put in the way of God’s “little ones”, and which of those make you particularly angry (enough to want to put a millstone around the perpetrator’s neck!)?

1. See Mary Ann Tolbert,  *Sowing the Gospel*: *Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective*. (Fortress, 1989) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)