

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 3

Galilee: "Healing & Teaching" Mark 2:1-3:6

Commentary: *The beginning of the end.*

It was only a matter of time! Only 79 verses into Mark's Gospel, we hear the first evidence of a 'plot to kill' – or "destroy" Jesus: a plot being hatched by the Religious authorities of Jesus' day; the Pharisees and Herodians – keepers of the religious Laws that governed the social and personal lives of all observant Jews. Already, Mark's Gospel has moved briskly in its telling of Jesus' ministry – not, His life, His mission.

Our reading for today recounted 5 conflicts: the 1st conflict was over two religious questions about the issues of healing (2:1-5a, 11-12) and forgiving (2:5b-10) resulting Jesus, who, when confronted, claims the authority to heal and forgive sins. The 2nd conflict over Jesus' call of – and association with – Levi, a tax collector and a sinner in the eyes of the Pharisees (2:13-17). The 3rd conflict was over the laws concerning fasting (2:18-22). The 4th conflict centers around Jesus' Sabbath violation – for plucking grain – a confrontation that resulted in self-proclamation that He was the Son of Man, who was the Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-28). The last – and 5th – conflict was over Jesus' healing the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (3:1-6). With each conflict the tension between the emerging Kingdom of God and the religious system it was replacing – between Jesus and the religious authorities – became more antagonistic.

Jesus was a 'new teacher' – thought, originally, to be a disciple of John the Baptist – teaching, with authority, about the coming kingdom of God, and now demonstrating amazing powers to cure diseases and heal (restore) individuals of physical ailments thought to be incurable. Just as Jesus was making a name for Himself among the lost, lonely, and less-than people of society who were hungry for hope – and who,

excitedly, responded to His Good News – He was making waves with the authorities who were feeling threatened by His message and popularity – but mostly because of His claims of who He was. In the 2nd Chapter of his Gospel, Mark makes a point to tell his listeners that Jesus' ministry was already offending two very important and powerful groups. But they were not the only people who Jesus – or the author – was trying to provoke.

How do you respond to these stories?

It's important to know that in these accounts, Jesus does not condemn Judaism – or reject the law, nor say that the Sabbath obsolete. Even in the face of their questions, Jesus does not call out the Pharisees as liars. What He does do is claim the authority to bring about the kingdom and

to carry out the law. And this was what threatened the 'authorities' and led to the escalation of hostilities that resulted in Jesus' death. Through all of this the author of Mark presents Jesus – and His actions – plainly, without any editorialization, letting them, and His words, speak for themselves.

Seen this way, the Gospel of Mark was written to try to evoke a response from its original audience – and subsequent readers. One way it does this is to challenge the preconceived expectations

of those hearing it. As a result, the Gospel of Mark tells a story of recurring controversy. Episodes such as we read this week are meant to both provide us with enough proof to believe in Jesus' claim that he is the Son of God and to provoke a reaction/response from us; they designed to demand a decision from us: do we believe He is who He says he is? Mark is unapologetically portraying Jesus as He is: Jesus is looking for followers who recognize Him for who He is on their own. Mark's Jesus demands a decision. He leaves no room for ambivalence—we are either with him or we oppose him. There is no in-between. You are either excited, eager to know more about Jesus' Good News, or you've already judged Him as a danger to society. So, how do you respond to these stories about Jesus?

Peek at the Greek: ἀπολλυμι: "ruin;" "destroy."

When talking about the pharisees' desire to kill Jesus, in 3:6, Mark uses the term "appollumi," which in this context means, "to dismiss," "to ruin," or "destroy." It's a word without sympathy, often used in the New Testament to describe the destruction of sinner (Mark 12:9, Luke 17:27; 29, Jude 5). Considering the previous verses, its also deeply ironic. Jesus cast out a demon (1:21-28), healed and forgave a paralytic (2:1-12), communicated the correct use of Old Testament law (2:18-28), and restored a man's withered hand (3:1-5). Despite all of this the Pharisees sought to kill Him, the one who came to bring life where death had formerly reigned.

From the Study Book