

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – January 21, 2018

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Reflect on the provided questions
3. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”
4. Read the provided commentaries below
5. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)

Reflection Questions on Mark 1:14-20:

1. Here is the well-known and familiar story of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who “immediately” (v. 18,20) leave their life as fishermen to follow Jesus when he invites them. While at first glance commendable and inspirational, how do we hold this example alongside the Brethren traditional teaching of “counting the cost”? (Especially given how high that cost is, as acknowledged even here with the mention of John’s arrest. Is this is an example for future disciples to follow, or just a story to awe and inspire?
2. Regardless of our conclusions about the above question, it is clear that there was something compelling about Jesus that deeply and literally changed the course of the lives of these disciples. Have you ever experienced something that compelling? Can you imagine anything so compelling that you would be willing to leave everything you know and start over on this new course?
3. Many Christians would argue that baptism and/or repentance is a prerequisite of being a Christian or following Jesus. Some have/would even consider it a condition of salvation. Here, however, Jesus calls these first disciples, who would become the core of his inner circle, and nowhere is there a hint that they showed signs of repentance or were ever baptized. Thoughts?
4. What does it really mean to “fish for people” (v.17)? For those of us who have not had the best experiences with evangelists (I am guessing there are few fish who desire to be caught, and no one can argue it is for their own good!), is there an alternative way of understanding this objective?

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?

Commentary on Mark 1:14-20

(From the *Homiletics* archive; "Jesus Chooses His Disciples – and they're Not Geniuses" – January 25, 2015)

There are times when a gospel passage shows little substantive connection to the surrounding material; Mark 1:14-20 is perhaps one such instance. While a few indicators point to some sort of shared narrative relationship, they appear to be more incidental rather than foundational for interpretation. For example, Jesus returns to Galilee after being baptized by John (cf. vv. 9, 14), and like John, Jesus preaches repentance (cf. vv. 4, 15). Beyond that, both men are denizens of the Judean wilderness (cf. vv. 4, 12). Later, after Jesus returns to Galilee, readers are promptly introduced to four of his initial followers, individuals whose subsequent role in the ensuing pericopes seems largely restricted to that of merely accompanying Jesus as he travels throughout Galilee (cf. vv. 21, 29, 36). Reading these passages in isolation, these four men come across more like sycophants or groupies, rather than informed disciples convinced of their cause.

In addition to the preceding interpretative challenges, Mark's account of Jesus' call of Peter, Andrew, James and John is so succinct that it borders on the incredulous. After all, what sane person would literally walk away from his or her livelihood based solely on the preposterous claim of a passerby that if you follow me "I will make you fish for people" (v. 17)? Another difficulty for readers is that the passage raises more questions than it answers. To illustrate: why was John arrested (v. 14)? Pressing the point, there is absolutely nothing previously in Mark's gospel that justifies John's arrest, an event that is not explained until much later (6:14-29).

Despite the preceding hindrances, this prosaic narrative nonetheless displays some notable features that underscore Mark's clever literary skill. Setting aside the inexplicable mystery surrounding John's imprisonment with the vague temporal clause of verse 14 -- "Now after John was arrested" -- Mark circles back to his opening assertion in the first block of this pericope, namely, that his gospel account is about "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (cf. 1:1, 14-15). Thus, when Jesus returns to Galilee and proclaims "the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (vv. 14-15), Mark signals that Jesus' message is not chiefly about the emergence of a new earthly institution, but the arrival of a person, specifically, Jesus himself, who will challenge and upend the status quo in the taken-for-granted world.

On one hand, two subjects -- "the good news" and "the kingdom of God" -- are peppered throughout Mark and highlight the gospel's global reach and the expectations for citizens of the kingdom (e.g., Mark 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; 4:26, 30; 9:47; 10:14-15, 23-27; 12:34). On the other hand, the call for repentance, though stressed in the opening chapter (vv. 4, 15), is not a common topic elsewhere in the Markan account. In fact, the only other occasion when repentance is specifically mentioned occurs when the Twelve "went out and proclaimed that all should repent" (6:12).

In the second block of this passage (i.e., vv. 16-20) Mark introduces his community to the first named disciples of Jesus, all fishermen. One possible reason for the specific identification of these disciples relates to their later roles in the gospel narrative. These are the same disciples who question Jesus about the temple's destruction (13:3). James and John are forever noted for their brazen request (10:35-45). Peter is undeniably a prominent figure in Mark's gospel. He declares with remarkable precision that Jesus is "the Messiah," but shortly thereafter vigorously rebukes him (8:29-33); as one intimate to another, Peter reminds Jesus that both he and the other disciples had left everything to follow him (10:28); and as Jesus is interrogated by the religious leaders, Peter regrettably denies him three times (cf. 14:26-31, 54, 66-72).

Besides accompanying Jesus throughout the initial days of his Galilean ministry, three of these four men eventually form the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. (In a way, Andrew is the forgotten disciple of the four fishermen. Other than being identified as Peter's brother and named as one of the Twelve, Andrew is rarely mentioned in Mark [cf. 1:16, 29; 3:18; 13:3]). When Jesus restored the life of the synagogues

leader's daughter, only the girl's parents and three disciples -- Peter, James and John -- were allowed to follow Jesus and witness her resurrection (5:21-24, 35-43). Jesus also invited these three disciples to join him on the mountain when he was transfigured (9:2-8). Finally, when Jesus and his disciples went to Gethsemane after the Last Supper, it was this same trio -- Peter, James and John -- that Jesus took with him while he prayed (14:32-42).

Although the preceding rationale has some merit, it still seems like there ought to be some other reason for including Jesus' call of these four Galilean fishermen right at the beginning of the gospel. One possible explanation for the structure of this account relates to John the Baptist's proclamation that "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me" (v. 7). John's sudden incarceration followed by the immediate "all in" response of Peter, Andrew, James and John, leaving their nets, boats and even families, suggests that Jesus' presence is so compelling -- so powerful, as John the Baptist proclaimed -- that people will abandon their possessions, trades and homes with dispatch. To put it differently, even without specifically attributing their response to the Holy Spirit, it appears that they had been baptized with God's Spirit, and therefore were compelled to leave everything as Peter later affirms (10:28). In sum, their radical deed of self-denial is a sign of repentance and demonstrates that they believed the good news: "the kingdom of God has come near."

Finally, there is an additional link between John the Baptist and Jesus that was omitted in the first paragraph, but is nevertheless exceptionally salient. Even though verse 14 mentions John's arrest in such a matter of fact way that some might describe it as offhand or nonchalant, the brief notice is momentous. Indeed, the lack of detail intensifies the suspense. Not only does John's arrest foreshadow Jesus' future arrest (cf. 12:12; 14:1, 44, 46, 48-49), it also portends Jesus' death given John's subsequent death at the hand of Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great). Indeed, the correspondence between John and Jesus -- both cousins were arrested and both were executed by the authorities -- reveals all too well that, although the kingdom of God has come near, it does so at tremendous cost.

Additional Resources

- [“The Text this Week”](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for this week...not all will relate to the Matthew passage we are studying, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out the commentaries and additional resources available for this Sunday (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).