

Day Two

The gospel accounts definitely give us names of places, provide us with associations of events and people, but often are unclear about the sequence of the events narrated. For instance, unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark begins telling us about Jesus as an adult. There is no nativity narrative in Mark's account; it begins stating that his narrative is about the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Jesus as an adult is first placed into a particular scene involving John the Baptist, the Baptist's message of repentance and the Jordan River. After his baptism, the urgent tone of Mark's account is set by Jesus immediately being driven into the wilderness for forty days before being tempted and tested by Satan. Strangely enough, after the testing we are not given any details about how long the angels ministered to Jesus or what he did in the intervening time or where he may have gone before the next passage which begins after John was arrested. But upon John's arrest we are told Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news." This is essentially the message of repentance which John had been proclaiming. At this point as Jesus passes along the Sea of Galilee, he begins recruiting those whom he will make his disciples. This walking along the seashore results in four men, two sets of brothers, being called to join Jesus. They immediately leave their nets to join Jesus. The Sea of Galilee has an extensive shoreline, but historically it is felt that these men were all residents of the village of Capernaum. This seems supported by the next passage where Jesus accompanied by these men go into the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath. Earlier when in verse 14 we are told that Jesus is proclaiming that God's kingdom has come near we are not told to whom this proclamation was made, nor where. To Mark, it was Jesus' actions which dominated his ministry, so up until this synagogue event, Jesus was preparing, getting ready for the actions he would do which would demonstrate the good news of the kingdom coming near. Under that perspective, the casting out of the unclean spirit marked day one of Jesus' ministry. The last comment about day one by Mark is "at once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee." We go from the "at once" of the after effects of the authority shown by Jesus in the synagogue to the "as soon as they left the synagogue of today's reading. Leaving the synagogue they go to the home of the brothers Simon and Andrew who have left their nets. When they arrive they discover that Simon's mother-in-law is ill with a fever. She is in bed. Again we encounter that tone of urgency—at once Jesus is told of her illness. Jesus' response is to take her by the hand and lift her up. Her fever leaves her and she begins to serve them. Many things have been said about this scene's description of healing followed by service. Some place emphasis on the healing of the fever—done with only the offering of a hand to lift her up. No words are spoken, no ritual invoked, just a healing presence offered. This ability to heal is held up as a sign of Jesus' power and identify as the promised Messiah. Some object that Mark reports that the mother-in-law begins to serve them as soon as she leaves her sickbed. They feel that this is somehow offensive that having been healed, she immediately begins to serve them. Others defend this as a sign of her healing, that she was restored to wholeness so her taking up her normal role in life as servant to the men of the household was confirmation of her healing. I would like to suggest that although both of those aspects of her healing are true: Jesus' ability to heal illness and the subsequent effect of

restoration to wholeness involves a return to life within the community are important for us to know. But I would also suggest that her response, a desire to serve is not something to find offensive, but is instead something to emulate. The word used in the text to describe what she does is the same word that is used to describe the functions of those designated to serve the early church's widows after the resurrections: *διηκόνει*. We call those officers of the church deacons. Her response to her healing according to Mark was a desire to serve, to offer care. If we think about it, that is the response that Jesus still asks for from those to whom he offers his presence in their lives: that they love and care for one another as he has cared and loved them. According to Mark's account it has been a busy Sabbath day, but that evening at sundown, although Sabbath has ended, we find that the activities of the day are far from over. "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him." The news of what Jesus had done in the morning at the synagogue has spread and as soon as the Sabbath restrictions on activity has ended with the approach of evening, all who have heard of Jesus' actions come to him bringing those who need his touch to heal and restore them to the community. And Jesus heals them. And it is upon that note that the first day of Jesus' ministry in Galilee ends. That's a very busy and for Mark who is known for his brevity, a very detailed account of the day. So what does Mark tell us about day 2? The first thing we learn is that it starts very early for Jesus—in the morning while it was still very dark. Jesus gets up, evidently before anyone else in the house. He goes out alone and without telling anyone—as we later discover they come searching for him. And what he does is go out away from the area where others are dwelling—he goes to a deserted place and prays. Mark does not tell us what Jesus prayed; he does not tell us how long he was able to be alone. He does tell us that Jesus began this second day of his active ministry with prayer; and that he sought out a deserted place for this time of prayer. When Simon and those with Simon found Jesus they related that Jesus was being sought by "everyone." Why they are searching is not explicitly recorded here in Mark—just "Everyone is searching for you." Perhaps, they are lining up to give their thanks, perhaps they want only to keep tabs on this man who could heal their illnesses. We don't know. What we do know is Jesus' response: "Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." Mark does not give us words for what the message of Jesus has been in Capernaum, but Jesus evidently has given a message to the people there—the message that he has been given—the message that the kingdom of God has come near. In Mark, that message is one of healing and restoration, of love and caring for all those who come to him. Mark's gospel account may be brief but it is clear that the message which Jesus brought is one of healing and restoration which mean that the kingdom of God is near. It is also clear from the description given of day two that the message was to be broadcast as Jesus carried out his stated intention to go to the neighboring towns—"And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons." The message he carried was declared by those who followed him to be good news—which is what the term gospel means. And the message of God's love and grace is good news, but it seems that there is a disconnect between what we receive as good news and what Jesus proclaimed. Jesus' proclamation—his message which brought healing and restoration stated that God's kingdom was near. We have somehow lost

that impetus—the impetus that Simon’s mother-in-law demonstrated—to get up and offer service in response. When we lift up the Lord’s prayer, we pray that God’s kingdom come, God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Yet we tend to think in terms of that happening at the end of times. Our passage from the Hebrew Scriptures for this morning began with Isaiah 40: 21—“Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning?” In the class which I am auditing on the prophets and prophetic teachings, we discussed the fact that the message of God’s desire for righteousness and justice was not new in the voice of the prophets. Passages from the Torah, the prophets and the writings all contain the same message that God desires all to be included within the framework of a community living together in peace and caring for all. We pulled texts from Deuteronomy, from Exodus, from the Psalms and of course from several prophets which state this truth. Certainly the message which Jesus brought and demonstrated to us was good news, but it was NOT new news. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?” Just as Jesus went into the countryside demonstrating the nearness of the kingdom of God, we are also called to go out and demonstrate that same nearness. We pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth; for God’s will to be done on earth. We know what God wills for the peoples of the earth—a life abundant, filled with community of caring for one another which is inclusive. We are called to go out and proclaim God’s caring, but also to demonstrate it. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.