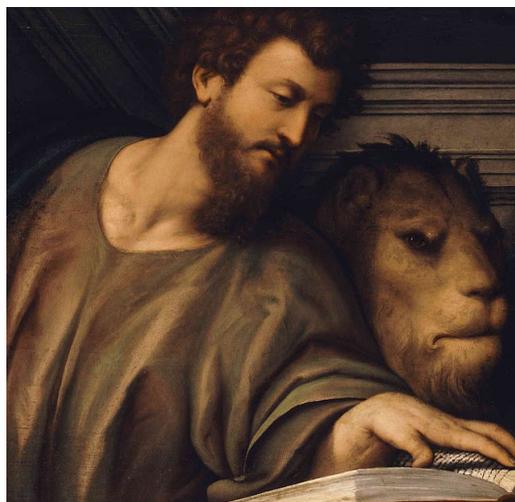


Good News - Gospel



Mark wrote his Gospel to tell the story of Jesus. Gospel means “Good News”.

For many centuries the symbol for Mark has been a lion - you can see it in this page from the *Lindisfarne Gospels* and in this painting from 1535 by Il Pordenone.



Jesus in Mark is like a bounding lion

Mark's Jesus appears abruptly and suddenly. We jump straight into the story with the appearance of John the Baptist. Jesus is baptised. Once he has been anointed with the Spirit, he is driven out into the wilderness to be tempted. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus returns. All this in the first 13 verses.

In chapter 1 Mark uses the phrase “and immediately” (*kai euthus* in Greek) eleven times. Here are two of them:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming 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.’ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1.14-20

By the end of chapter 1 Jesus has also started his teaching ministry, healed a man in the synagogue, healed Peter’s mother-in-law, healed many others who are sick or possessed, gone round the towns and synagogues of Galilee, and healed a leper. The pace of this Gospel is unrelenting.

Why is there no Nativity in Mark’s Gospel?

Mark was probably written first and is based on Peter’s memories. Jesus’ birth was not that important - more important was his calling, baptism, work, and the cross. John’s Gospel does not include Christmas either. Too often we worship the baby in the manger, and don’t follow the grown man.





Jesus in Mark as a Beast of Conflict

Mark's Jesus roams far and wide in the territories around Galilee. Wherever he goes there is trouble! His lion-like activities - "mighty acts" (to use Mark's language) - evoke a reaction, usually landing him in trouble and conflict. As early as Mark 3 we hear of a plot to kill him, and his own family don't understand him.

The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Mark 3.6

Then Jesus went home; and the crowd came together again, so that he and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'

Mark 3.19b-21

This reminds us of the conflict with the devil in the wilderness.

Mark's Jesus is "indeed a beast of conflict, a lion roaming territory to establish his control over the real source of opposition, the devil himself ... Mark sets a lion to conquer a lion, and his Jesus is more powerful."

Richard Burridge, page 45



The Lion and his Pride

Jesus is in the business of calling a pride of lions to join him in his work:

Looking at those who sat around him, Jesus said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' *Mark 3.34-35*

Jesus summons people to follow him and to fish for people - remember that chorus from our Sunday School days "I will make you fishers of men".

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. *Mark 1.16-20*

Fishing is not a benign, gentle image - we are a long way away from the quiet reflective angler sitting alongside an English river, smoking his pipe, without a care in the world.

Think of a hunting lion ...



The disciples follow Jesus and join in with his hunt for people. In due course they are commissioned to do what he does:

Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. *Mark 3.13-15*

Following a lion is not easy. Jesus sometimes seems to maul his disciples for their dilatoriness:

Jesus said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' *Mark 4.40*

Then Jesus got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And the disciples were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. *Mark 6.51-52*

But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' *Mark 8.33*

In Mark's Gospel the lion rushes headlong to the cross, with the disciples struggling to follow in his wake:

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.' *Mark 10.32-34*



Into the Lion's Den

Mark offers us a surprising twist in the plot. Jesus the lion will enter the den of other lions in Jerusalem. At first he seems to be present as the lion of the tribe of Judah, coming to restore all things:

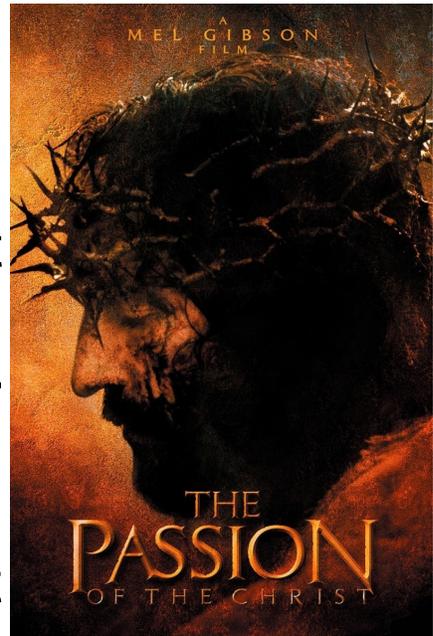
Then they came to Jerusalem. And Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.'

Mark 11.15-17

But ultimately Mark's Jesus is not present as the lion, but as the one like Daniel, a frail human being in the lion's den.



Mark's story slows down as we approach the Passion of Jesus (the story of his suffering and death). Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life, is given 6 chapters of a 16 chapter story - 20% is devoted to the Passion (chapters 14 and 15). The Markan Passion is the most brutal and horrific.



The lion is silenced and muzzled as he stands trial:

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so.' Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Mark 15.1-5

The lion's roar ironically becomes a desperate cry from the cross:

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Mark 15.33-34



These words come from Psalm 22, which also includes this lament:

They open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

Psalm 22.13

The Lion of Judah has become the prey himself.

“Jesus is the Son of God, powerful and mighty in his cosmic struggle, and that is not to be forgotten; but there is no last minute miraculous escape for him - and those who follow should expect no less.”

Richard Burridge, page 62



The Lion goes to Galilee

The Gospel of Mark has a strange ending ... at least in its oldest form.

The young man tells the women who come to embalm the body of Jesus:

‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16.6-8

“The lion bounds on, roars and bounds off again, calling us to see him, in Galilee, somewhere.”

Richard Burridge, page 63



Does this story help illuminate the story Mark tells?

In the Narnia books, the lion roars and rushes on ahead. Aslan leads them all in a headlong chase into his country: "Come farther in! Come farther up!"

Yet Aslan allows himself to be seized in order to rescue Edmund from the clutches of the White Witch. His mane is shaved, and his jaws



are muzzled. He is mocked as a big pussy cat, and then is killed on the stone table.

C.S. Lewis's *Aslan* seems to be a good model for the Jesus of Mark:



“Then he isn’t safe?”
said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr
Beaver, “Who said
anything about safe?
‘Course he isn’t safe.
But he’s good. He’s the
King, I tell you.”

Is our God too tame?

This display by Peter Barham (November 2014) is based on a booklet “The Lion’s Share” by David J. Bryan, produced for the Lindisfarne Regional Training Programme (Autumn 2014).

The book by Richard Burridge is Four Gospels, one Jesus? London: SPCK, 1994 (new edition 2005). The images used have simply been taken from the web - if I have breached anyone’s copyright, I apologise. Please contact me and I will delete them.

