

St. Mark, Evangelist

April 25, 2021

Mark 16:14-20 & 2 Timothy 4:5-18

The symbol for the Gospel of Mark is the Lion – the Lion is a symbol of power, pride, magnificence, nobility, and courage. The Lion also represents Jesus' resurrection and Christ as the King of heaven and earth.

One of the reasons given for the Lion serving as a symbol of Mark's Gospel is the manner in which the Gospel begins. The roar of a lion is not without notice, it is fierce, and it is decisive. There's no birth narrative or historical recounting of events of wise men and angels; instead, the Gospel quickly and immediately begins with the fulfillment of John the Baptist, who is the messenger,

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.'"*

This straightening of paths is the call and action of repentance within the heart of man, the need to be reconciled to the Father.

If you want to know the theme of Mark's Gospel, hear the words of John the Baptist and the words of Jesus that the Kantor sang this morning in the Alleluia and verse; Jesus says, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* (Mark 1:15)

Here lies the entire purpose and ministry of Jesus. The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is present, and in His life, death, and resurrection – forgiveness and eternal life are present for those who repent and believe in the Gospel, the "Good News" of Jesus Christ.

But, what about Mark, the person? Why observe this feast day?

Well, the whole Gospel of Mark is one of urgency and immediacy. Some theologians believe it best illustrates the battles and needs of life today. He doesn't waste time in his writing and moves things along with precision.

Mark is often seen as a young man, a son, or a student.

As writers often do, it is believed he wrote himself into the Gospel that bears his name. Many believe he is the rich young man in chapter 10 who asked Jesus, *"Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* Jesus answered first by asking why he called Him good, but then went on to teach the young lad how possessions and status will not grant you eternal life; only the teacher he had called *"Good"* could do this.

Mark is also believed to have tagged along as Jesus, and the disciples go to the Garden of Gethsemane. As an observer to the arrest of Jesus, he escapes the guards' grasp – but he does so naked and uncovered – leaving his clothing in the clutches of the soldier's hands as he ran away.

After Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father, Mark accompanies his cousin Barnabas and Paul on a missionary journey to proclaim the Gospel. However, things don't go as they are planned; it seems like many things don't go as Mark plans as he doesn't finish the journey and abruptly returns home. The early departure didn't sit well with Paul and, in the end, drove a wedge into the relationship of Paul and Mark.

Scripture does not provide specifics into why Mark returned home early, but we know the hurt left a lasting imprint upon Paul because when Barnabas and Paul prepared for another journey in Acts 15, Paul did not wish for Mark to join them. A sharp disagreement then arose between the parties of Barnabas and Paul. Instead of one team of missionaries departing in harmony to spread the Gospel, two groups went forth, divided, hurt, and in separate directions.

Sharp disagreements occur within our lives and within the Church, all the time, don't they? Some conflicts we encounter have minor practical implications to the proclamation of the Gospel – and yet they can easily fester and severely impact the ministry of the Church – the clear and decisive proclamation of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In these instances, the theme of Mark's Gospel should ring within your ears - *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."*

Repenting is not easy. Apologizing makes you feel naked and ashamed. You have done wrong; you have harmed your neighbor physically, emotionally, or spiritually. You'd probably prefer to run away and hide than apologize.

Again, we don't know what occurred between Paul and Mark; the scriptures are silent. But, in the Epistle today, Paul says, *"Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."*

What can we gather from this? The men reconciled with one another. These two apostles were at odds, they would not travel together or be in one another's company, but in the end, they reconciled.

They are the body of Christ, they are members of the Church on earth, and in turn, their voices are joined to those of the Church in heaven.

Whenever we observe a feast or festival of a saint, we should always ask why.

The Augsburg Confession states, *"Our churches teach that the remembrance of the saints is to be commended so that we may imitate their faith and good works according to our calling."* (AC XXI)

We are called to remember these saints and permit our faith to be strengthened as we see God's mercy extended to them. Finally, Mark is to be an example for you and me to imitate in both faith and holy living according to the Word of God. (Paraphrase of LSB Page xii)

To remember the apostle Mark is to hear a call to repentance in words written within the Gospel that bears his name. It is to see how God granted His mercy and forgiveness to him, even as he was at times caught up in his earthly possessions or scattering with the disciples as Jesus was arrested.

To remember Mark is to witness and imitate the reconciliation and forgiveness seen within the relationship of two brothers, Mark and Paul. They ultimately wish to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation to the nations.

However, the reality remains, we simply do not enjoy reconciliation as we ought to. We certainly appreciate hearing others say they are sorry, but these words do not always flow freely off our tongues or out of our mouths. It's not fun, but if you think about it even for a moment, I'm sure there is someone, possibly in this sanctuary, that needs your forgiveness, and you may need theirs.

At the end of the Gospel today, we heard, ***"He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned."*** What condemns is the lack of faith, and faith that lacks forgiveness is dead.

I wish life were easy, but it is not. This life we live is not tame, but it is dangerous. The pitfalls of sin surround all of us. If we reflect on the past, you remember times when Satan has prowled around you like a roaring lion, placing lies into your ears, leading you into temptation, and causing you to be led into unbelief and despair.

The Gospel of Mark from start to finish is not tame; it cuts straight to the heart of what is wrong – the sinfulness of man. It is a good Gospel because it reveals to you, the downcast, and those wrapped up in the bondage of your sin, your savior, Jesus Christ.

As you depart this day, remember how the font has united you in Christ Jesus, how you all share the name of Christ as it was placed upon your foreheads and your hearts.

As you approach the rail, remember that you are united in this Supper. Flesh and blood are present for the forgiveness of your sins (and for your sins).

And as you go about your lives this week, remember that ***"you have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer you who live, but Christ [that] lives in you and the life which [you] now live in the flesh [you] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [you] and gave Himself for [you]."*** (Galatians 2:20)

Dear friends, see the love of Christ in Mark this day and see it in one another. +INJ+

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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