

Feast of St. Mark (my favorite)

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Near the top of my list of biblical thanksgivings is [St. Mark's](#) gospel account. I'm a firm believer in the importance of a 1x4 gospel, so I will admit that the other three are necessary to tell the whole good news of Jesus Christ. But Mark is definitely my favorite. He doesn't mess around with apocryphal birth narratives (Luke) or get lost in the esoteric importance of genealogy (Matthew). He doesn't open with some highfalutin prologue that clergy only pretend to understand (John). Instead, he starts right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and tells it like it is.

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." I can't think of a better place to start. As "Son of God" suggests, Mark might give us a pretty straightforward gospel account, but he doesn't leave out important Christological details. For example, he continues with a quote from Isaiah, which was a favorite way to talk about the coming of the messiah. He is putting all of the pieces together, but he does it subtly and gently. There's an understated quality to Mark's text that I find very appealing.

The opening lines of any story are important. Even though the reader may not remember them by the time he gets halfway through the tale, they have shaped the way the whole work has been received. Mark is no exception. If I asked a Christian to summarize the faith in one or two sentences, I'd bet there would be words about cross and tomb and resurrection. And yes, of course, those are indispensable. But I like how Mark pulls it all together. He sets the stage with John the Baptist's message of repentance and then passes the baton to Jesus, who, after being tempted in the wilderness for forty days, returns and says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." That's a summary of the faith—one that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a part of but that, while containing all of that, says even more.

Why did Jesus die? Why did he rise? Why did he do everything he did? What's the point? Mark tells us right here that the kingdom has come near. The time is fulfilled. We aren't waiting anymore. The kingdom is now. This is it. Everything else that follows—the miracles, the teachings, the conflict with authority, the cross, the grave, the empty tomb—all of it testifies to the fact that with Jesus God's kingdom has drawn near.

I think that we Christians lose track of this. We get lost in the wonder of the miracles or subsumed by the drama of Holy Week and forget that all that Jesus did points us to a central truth—Jesus has brought the kingdom of God to us and has invited us to be a part of that kingdom. During his life and ministry, the world thought of God’s kingdom as something distant and future—something defined by divine justice over God’s enemies. Jesus showed the world that God’s kingdom is here and now and that it is defined by justice for the weak and the oppressed. The religious authorities thought that a relationship with God was only possible through personal holiness. Jesus taught that a relationship with God is possible because God has made all of us holy.

If we aren’t careful, we find ourselves right where Jesus’ contemporaries were—defining the kingdom in terms that don’t reflect Jesus’ life and ministry. That’s what happens when we forsake the forest for the trees. Get back to the roots of our faith. Listen to Mark’s testimony and rediscover what’s important.

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