



Jacob Lawrence
The Great Migration
1941

Resources for Dismantling Racism: the Gospel of Mark

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Washington, DC

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Fall 2021

Opening Questions

- ❖ Thoughts, reflections, and questions for the reading this week and last?



Understanding

- ❖ What is Jesus' message? What is his proclamation? **For whom?**



Understanding

- ❖ Resources for Dismantling Racism
- ❖ Understanding Racism as an historical and cultural system of oppression (as a matter policy)
- ❖ Called to radical action
- ❖ Central Theme for Mark: the blindness of ~~the disciples~~ us
- ❖ Mark: An eternal echo calling us to action



Mark 1:1-20

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight,’”

Beginning at the End: Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "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.

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❖ Galilee = גליל (galíl)

❖ literally: cylinder or circle

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1. "Behold, I (God) send my messenger (**John/**
Elijah) before your face (**Jesus**) who will construct
your way."
2. "Behold, I (God) send my messenger (**Jesus**)
before your face (**the disciples**) who will
construct your way."
3. "Behold, I (God) send my messenger (**the**
evangelist) before your face (**us**) who (by writing
a gospel) will construct your way."



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Understanding

- ❖ Mark: An eternal echo calling us to action
- ❖ Even though we might know all the right words (that Jesus is the Messiah) we must begin again. And read the Gospel again with fresh eyes. Jesus really meant what he said; Jesus is calling us to radical social and political action on behalf of the poor and marginalized



Review: Diving Back into Mark as literary text

Claim

- ❖ Jesus aligns himself with sinners (the poor / outcast / diseased)

Economic Inequality

- ❖ Jesus condemns the religious and political establishment (the powerful)

Religious Nationalism

- ❖ Jesus willfully breaks the law and redefine's holiness

Ethnic / racial prejudice

Reference

- ❖ Radical redistribution of wealth (mass feedings in Chapter 6 and 8; and rejection of wealth in Chapter 10)
- ❖ Fundamental rejection of religious nationalism and the Davidic covenant (especially in Chapter 1 and 12)
- ❖ Reorientation away from tribe to equality before God (especially in Chapter 3, 5, 6, 7)

Review: Diving Back into Mark as literary text

As Jesus passed along **the Sea of Galilee**, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—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.

- Meaning versus facts
- The way in which Mark both uses high symbolism and also gives an ordinary account (grounded in historical fact) of Palestinian life
- *Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children ... who will not receive a hundredfold ... Mark 10:29 (also Mark 3:35)*

Detailed: 24 Hours in the Life of

They went to Capernaum; and when the **sabbath** came, he entered the **synagogue** and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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Detailed: 24 Hours in the Life of

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the **house** of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Detailed: 24 Hours in the Life of

That evening, at sunset, 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.

Detailed: 24 Hours in the Life of

In the **morning**, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a **deserted place**, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "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." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Debt and Purity

Socio-Political-Religious Context

the rabbinic literature suggests three symbolic systems:

- ❖ Judeans / Hebrews could be identified by special times (Sabbath) and places (the Temple),
- ❖ special things (diet) and
- ❖ special bodily marks (circumcision)



Hierarchy of people

(1) priests;

(2) Levites;

(3) Israelites;

(4) converts;

(5) freed slaves;

(6) disqualified priests
(illegitimate children of
priests);

(7) netins (temple
slaves);

(8) mamzers (bastards);

(9) eunuchs;

(10) those with
damaged testicles;

(11) those without a
penis (ibid.).



Debt and Purity

- Economically the temple dominated Jerusalem, and to a lesser extent all of Judea.
- Though originally intended as the “central storehouse” of the redistributive economy, it had come to represent massive capital accumulation.



Debt and Purity

- From the tithes and other dues to the priesthood and temple, through repayment and interest on loans, and even through the contributions which Diaspora Jews from around the world sent to the Temple, surplus wealth flowed into, and piled up in, Jerusalem.
- There were no mechanisms, however, by which these resources could be channeled to the people most in need. . . . Rather, some of the surplus wealth was used on luxury goods or simply stored in the temple treasury, in the form of valuable metals or objects



Debt and Purity

- Galilee was the most naturally fertile agricultural region in Palestine
- Very likely that Rome gave some portion of the land to foreign generals/ aristocracy
- Growth during (in general) during Hellenism



Debt and Purity

- ❖ Some peasant holdings were subdivided, but more often the younger brothers were left landless because of the inheritance laws.
- ❖ Moreover, large numbers of other peasants who had fallen into debt were forced into the ranks of the rural proletariat.
- ❖ Most of these became marginal day-laborers. Herod, and to a degree, his successors employed many of these in elaborate building projects (e.g. the Temple).



Debt and Purity

- ❖ That these laborers, permanently uprooted from the land, formed a potential source of instability was a fact not lost on the ruling group.
- ❖ Thus even without the factor of foreign rule there would have been intense hostility between the common people and the ruling gentry and chief priests
- ❖ A Galilean tenant farmer could have up to half his harvest extracted as rent (to local religious leaders / aristocracy), the Temple, etc.



Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

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- ❖ This is a job for priests (who have presumably refused)
- ❖ The primary problem here is not physical ailment but social ostracizing
- ❖ Leprosy threatens communal integrity and holiness
- ❖ No "biological" description
- ❖ Jesus declares clean (he does not cleanse)

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- ❖ Jesus means to rebuke the failure of the priests to heal / reintegrate this man
- ❖ Testimony to / against them
- ❖ Overriding issue is of justice (Mosaic law)

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- ❖ More than just a miracle worker
- ❖ Does not seek fame
- ❖ True sign of God: not power over nature but the ability to give *true* liberation
- ❖ Jesus becomes a marked political target (inexplicable if there were no political challenge in his healings)

Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

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Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

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- ❖ A story of disability (impurity) and poverty (debt)
- ❖ Disease and physical disability were an inextricable part of the cycle of poverty

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- ❖ Jesus subverts their control of purity codes and of the debt code
- ❖ Jesus continues his conflict with public officials (representatives of the dominant social order)
- ❖ Jesus’ self-proclaimed title: the Human One (Son of Man)
- ❖ Blasphemy is ultimately what Jesus will be executed for (scribes show up next in climatic challenge in chapter 3)
- ❖ Amazed (disoriented, dazed, terror — see Mark 16)

Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

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- ❖ The Sea is where Jesus calls and teaches his disciples (in the first half of Mark)
- ❖ Levi not mentioned again, indicates that the 12 named disciples are not the only or even the primary disciples
- ❖ A semi-gentile retelling of Jesus' calling of Simon, et al?

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- ❖ First use of “disciple”; not used until direct ministry with the poor and alienated
- ❖ Sitting at table = reclining at meals upon the left elbow (universal Hellenism)
- ❖ Discipleship happens in house, at table, with sinners
- ❖ And thus, it's pinnacle: the Eucharist

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- ❖ First case of triangulation?

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- ❖ If sin is about the breaking of Mosaic law then why would Jesus come and recline
- ❖ If the aristocracy is really "well" then why is Jesus so consistently confrontational with them?
- ❖ Jesus unmasks the Pharisaic duplicity: for all their rhetoric about extending holiness to all of Israel, their practice betrays their commitment to rigid social boundaries

Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

❖ Against asceticism

Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

- ❖ More Eucharistic imagery: the false covenant (purity over justice) versus the new covenant (all equal before God)

Detail: Jesus Challenges Culture of Purity

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, **“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?”** And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

- ❖ First hint of real legal problems to come (and again, highlighting the political nature of Jesus' actions)

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- ❖ exegesis vs eisegesis
- ❖ Jesus adds to the story: David and his men were hungry
- ❖ What kind of rules does Jesus reject?
- ❖ Debt (poverty) and Purity (exclusion)
- ❖ Larger point about what Jesus rejects (the Temple system) and accepts (the Torah — *his* reading of it)

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- ❖ David and his men were hungry
- ❖ What kind of rules does Jesus reject?
- ❖ Debt (poverty) and Purity (exclusion)

Future Classes

Chapter 2: Socio-economic context of ancient Palestine (especially Galilee), systems of purity and debt culture

Chapter 3: Rival religious traditions: Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.

Chapter 4: Apocalypse as literature

Chapter 5: Mission to the Gentiles

Chapter 6: Mission to the Poor

Chapter 7: What is Faith?



Stuff I Missed

- ❖ Apocalyptic and ordinary
- ❖ A new heaven and a new earth, yes
- ❖ But also: Jesus calls fisherman; Jesus does not remain in the wilderness (in heaven) but jumps in to the chaos with both feet



Palestine



Judea



Map of Israel in the

Debt and Purity

	Pollution/purity	Debt/gift
Land/ table	dietary taboo (Lv 11,17)	tithe; Jubilee/Sabbath (Lv 23, 25, 27)
Village/ house	sexual/body relations (Lv 12-15)	socio-ethical statutes (Lv 18-20)
Synagogue/ sanctuary	idolatry/blasphemy; priests (Lv 21-22, 24, 26)	cultus; sacrifice (Lv 1-10)

