



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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Summary

- ❖ The vast poverty that Jesus' ministry occurs in (an oppressive system that the religious establishment both benefits from and perpetuates)



Understanding

- ❖ Mark: An eternal echo calling us to action
- ❖ Mark: what is it like to truly understand faith?



Debt and Purity: Responses

- ❖ With the emergence of the synagogue system, Torah was increasingly central to the symbolic order. It was the domain of the scribal class, which consisted of both Pharisees and Sadducees, higher and lower clergy ...



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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Debt and Purity: Responses

- ❖ The strict legal / religious code that had taken hold in Jesus' era lead to multiple responses
- ❖ Pharisees: Piety for the masses!
 - ❖ A liberalized purity code (mass exceptions)



Debt and Purity: Responses

- ❖ Sadducees: God for only the priests (everyone else is exempt)
- ❖ the Sadducees refused to recognize the legitimacy of Pharisaic oral tradition, for it threatened their exclusive hegemony over the symbolic order.



Debt and Purity: Responses

- ❖ Essenes: withdrawal to semi-monastic communities
- ❖ Rejected the classism of the Sadducees
- ❖ Rejected liberalism of the Pharisees



Debt and Purity: Responses

- ❖ All three responses fundamentally assume that the purity code is non-negotiable and thus the centrality of the temple (religious nationalism)
- ❖ This is what we see Jesus reject
- ❖ Where is there agreement: Torah is the Word of God



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Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

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- ❖ Jesus re-enters the heart of the Jewish symbolic order
- ❖ Compare and contrast this episode to Jesus' first entry into the synagogue in Mark 1

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- ❖ Carefully staged political theater
- ❖ Jesus chooses to force the issue (publicly breaks law)

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- ❖ What is the higher principle?
- ❖ Deuteronomy

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- ❖ Compare to other moments of silence in Mark (Jesus before Pilot, ...)

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- ❖ What Mark describes here is rage and it's unparalleled in the Gospels

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- ❖ The religious and political establishment join together to defeat Jesus
- ❖ Attacking the system means civil unrest; Jesus does not shy away from this

Detail: Jesus Rebels

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they 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." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

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Then he went home; and the **crowd** came together again, so that they 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." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

- ❖ The crowd reappears (the anonymous poor)
- ❖ Restrain = arrest (a socio-political remark)
- ❖ Popular media = Jesus is crazy

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- ❖ The scribes reappear from the beginning of Chapter 3
- ❖ Beelzebul = prince of darkness (apocalyptic image)
- ❖ Kingdom = Davidic messiah (religious nationalism)
- ❖ House = temple

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- ❖ The power of Herod, the power of priests
- ❖ John: Jesus is stronger
- ❖ Jesus is Lord of the (true) House
- ❖ True messiah is a robber (again, legal disobedience)

Detail: Jesus Rebels

“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

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- ❖ The end of tribal alliance as the locust of moral / religious gatherings
- ❖ The end of patriarchy
- ❖ The end discrimination, prejudice

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?



Palestine



Judea

