



Jacob Lawrence
The Great Migration
1941

Resources for Dismantling Racism: the Gospel of Mark

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On Faith

- ❖ Where do we find faith?
- ❖ Motivating idea: faith is not that much different than our normal lives
- ❖ The other way around: our normal lives are infused with the Holy



On Faith

- ❖ Faith is not about complex theological posturing
- ❖ Mark asks us to consider most fully what faith is by
 - ❖ Rejecting simplistic accounts
 - ❖ We see this in the following tensions in the gospel:



On Faith

- ❖ Mark will conflate two texts (Isaiah, Malachi; 1:2f.)
- ❖ Give a well-known story a twist (David's companions were hungry; 2:25f.),
- ❖ add a commandment to the Decalogue (do not defraud; 10:19),
- ❖ or manipulate familiar symbols (riding into Jerusalem; 11:1ff)
- ❖ Have Jesus say that forgiveness is not possible (3:29) and then make that person his chief disciple



On Faith

- ❖ So what's the guiding principle?
- ❖ The Human One and all true prophets are not identified by miracles or rhetorical mastery; but by their solidarity with the poor and outcast and their willingness to engage in political/institutional conflict



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Summary

- ❖ Jesus believes that true following (healing, releasing of debt, touching the untouchable) necessarily will mean political confrontation (Mark 3:4)
- ❖ The holistic nature of understanding scripture (whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness: but what about Mary?)
- ❖ On words versus deeds:



Summary

- ❖ Mark is organized around Jesus' mission, journeys, and conflicts
- ❖ The power of the word in Mark is subordinate to that of deed
- ❖ He trained his disciples into practices not rhetoric



This Week: *Jesus Teaches*

- ❖ The Sea
 - ❖ A place to call the disciples
 - ❖ A place to teach



Jesus Teaches

- ❖ Mark carefully sets the scene through intertextual stitching:
 - ❖ “Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them” (Mark 2:13)
 - ❖ “Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea ... [and] he cured many” (Mark 3:7)



Detail: Jesus teaches (Chapter 4)

Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Against the grain: ways in which Mark counters apocalyptic imagery:
 - ❖ Mark builds dramatic framework around mundane events: the Sea and land journeys, with family members, uses basic farming terminology
 - ❖ The heavenly (baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection) is immediately contrasted with the common — they are intertwined together



The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Combat myths: wilderness confrontation (the wild beasts in chapter 1 — pulled from the book of Daniel); the Strong Man versus the Strength of Jesus
 - ❖ Also Mark is likely written during a literal war



The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Secret revelation: a secret that is kept from many (but not who you might expect: revealed to simple peasants — the rich and powerful are blind)



The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Suffering not only should not be avoided but can lead to revolution/redemption (Mark 8-10, Jesus' prediction of death, command to take up the cross)



The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Liberation from domination: in Mark, not just from roman occupation but also, more broadly, from the domination found in human behavior (actual release of the captives, poor, outcast; but also “spiritual” release from hardness of heart and corruption)



The Apocalypse:

General Themes

- ❖ Dualism: the new order versus the old (wine, chapter 2); insiders versus outsiders:
- ❖ See Mark 4:10ff — next slide



Detail: Jesus teaches

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the **secret of the kingdom of God**, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that

'they may indeed **look, but not perceive,**
and may indeed listen, but not understand;
so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

- ❖ Ultimately Mark works against these simple dualism: the opposition of scribes turns into the opposition of the disciples
- ❖ Again, consider the arch of Mary's story in Mark
- ❖ All those who oppose Jesus are given a chance at redemption (and in many cases find it)

Detail: Jesus teaches

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- ❖ The poor anonymous crowd is the subject of this extended sermon
- ❖ Consider how simple this imagery issue: mostly given in agrarian terms that any peasant would understand

Detail: Jesus teaches

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you **understand all the parables**? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

- ❖ Another key to understand the text as whole

Detail: Jesus teaches

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- ❖ Obstacle: Satan
- ❖ No action in response to the call of Jesus
- ❖ Example: Peter — whom Jesus calls Satan

Detail: Jesus teaches

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- ❖ Obstacle: persecution
- ❖ Example: everyone :-)
- ❖ Specifically the disciples who flee in the garden (Mark 14)
- ❖ The very real desire to avoid suffering as a cause for not following the path with Jesus

Detail: Jesus teaches

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- ❖ Obstacle: wealth
- ❖ Example: the rich man (chapter 10)
- ❖ Again, notice how closely Jesus ties this major teaching to the fundamental question about poverty and wealth
- ❖ Wealth is almost always a negativism

Detail: Jesus teaches

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- ❖ Once suffering is accepted and wealth rejected: there is enough for the dignity of all
- ❖ Hundredfold: enough money to break the cycle of poverty—enough to end share cropping and buy the land itself

Detail: Jesus teaches

He said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? **For there is nothing hidden**, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

- ❖ The difficulty is not in understanding what’s being asked to be “on the way” with Jesus
- ❖ Rather what’s being asked is shockingly simple (even for fisherman!)
- ❖ These parables *unveil* the true loyalties of the hearer — that is what is polarizing about them

Detail: Jesus teaches

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and **the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.** The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

- ❖ Revolutionary patience and hope is required
- ❖ This is no chia pet! *No simple mechanism to fix*
- ❖ There will be set backs — like 2,000 years of set backs
- ❖ Against cynical realism: nothing ever really changes

Detail: Jesus teaches

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

- ❖ In late biblical literature the sheltering branch was a common metaphor for political hegemony
- ❖ Daniel: The tree you saw, which grew and became strong ... whose branches the birds of the air dwelt — it is you, O king ... and your dominion to the ends of the earth
- ❖ Compare and contrast the true kingdom to the false one (the true Israel—a small insignificant thing branching into the fullness of God)

Detail: Jesus teaches

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, **“Let us go across to the other side.”**

- ❖ That is... Let's take the message to the Gentiles