

Thursday in the Second Week after the Epiphany

January 13, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year One: Hebrews 7:23–8:7; Psalm 40:9–14; Mark 3:7–12*

The evangelists we know as Matthew and Luke are wonderful evangelists. Reading the evangelist we know as John brings the majesty of God to my soul. But I like reading and studying the first gospel, the one by the evangelist we call Mark. Almost always, his narrative moves quickly—Mark’s word is “immediately.” Matthew and Luke pick it up from Mark—fourteen times in Matthew, twelve in Luke, once in John—but thirty-four times in what by far is the shortest gospel, Mark.

Sometimes I have to remind myself that in Mark, unlike in Matthew and Luke, there is no dialogue between Jesus and Satan, just temptations for God’s beloved Son.¹ In other words, the battle between Jesus and Satan is the beginning of his work on earth. Joel Marcus, now professor emeritus at Duke Divinity School, notes that Matthew leads with the Sermon on the Mount, Luke with Jesus sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, and John with the wedding celebration in Cana.² With regards to Mark, he quotes the late German Lutheran scholar Ernst Käsemann: “Mark is all about clearing the earth of demons.”³

After calling brothers Simon and Andrew and brothers James and John, they head for Capernaum and its synagogue. There Jesus frees a man from an unclean spirit.⁴ He then heals Simon’s mother-in-law. That same night, he healed all who were sick in the town, and he “cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.”⁵ God’s dominion was for all people. He and his disciples scoured Galilee for the sick and possessed.

¹ Mark 1:12–13; Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13.

² Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 190.

³ Ibid. See Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 58.

⁴ Mark 1:21–28.

⁵ Mark 1:34.

When he returned to Capernaum and the synagogue, the Pharisees were ready for him. Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, 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 held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”⁶ The battle against God’s dominion over sickness, death, and evil is out in the open. But Jesus continues to silence demons and to try to silence those he heals.⁷

William Wrede was a German Lutheran scholar—he died at the age of 47 in 1906. He wrote an important book on the Second Letter to the Thessalonians, arguing that Paul himself did not write it. Perhaps he’s most well-known for his 1901 book, *The Messianic Secret*.⁸

Marcus writes, “Most present-day [scholars] would accept Wrede’s leading insight that the secrecy motif primarily reflects early Christian theology.”⁹ The question of why the secrecy isn’t settled. It seems to function one way in most of the miracle stories, differently in other narratives.

In Mark, Jesus’ identity is revealed on the morning of his resurrection, but not to his male disciples: “Entering the tomb, [Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome] saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’”¹⁰

⁶ Mark 3:4–6.

⁷ Mark 1:45.

⁸ Marcus, 525 – 27.

⁹ Ibid., 525–26.

¹⁰ Mark 16:5–7.

Our gospel readings at the daily Eucharists will continue to be from Mark except on feasts days and other commemorations until the beginning of Lent. I'm excited to have more time with Mark at our daily services as we are on Sundays in Mark's year.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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