
Immediately: Jesus' Teaching for Action in the Public World

Norma Cook Everist

*Distinguished Professor Emerita of Church and Ministry
Wartburg Theological Seminary*

I have long been intrigued with the frequency of the word “immediately” in Mark’s gospel. We who live in a fast-paced world can relate. In this shortest of the Gospels, Mark moves on rapidly. What is at stake? Are there patterns? I encourage you to read Mark’s gospel all the way through—at once.¹

Likewise, I, as a theological educator, in this article will explore the term, “Teacher.” When was Jesus named “Teacher”? When, where, how and to whom did he teach? What were the responses? The disciples, the crowds who witnessed his healing, and those who resisted Jesus to the point of killing him, often did not understand. We see their reaction through their “mere” amazement. This amazement itself is an intriguing element of Mark’s gospel.

So, where does Mark’s Jesus lead us? Out into the world where he and we are confronted by evil. Not only a personal evil spirit from which one needs to be freed, but the challenge of systemic evil. This exploration is about freedom from being enslaved and immobilized by systemic evil, freed for a teaching authority of servanthood. Through a theology of the cross *and* resurrection, immediately—now—we are called to action in the public world.

Immediately

The Greek word, *euthus*, and its variants is used six times in Matthew, three times in Luke and three times in John. It is used forty-two times in Mark.² Mark breathes urgency into every chapter.³ Are we willing to follow Christ wherever he leads? Are we prepared to use every gift, talent, and situation to lead others to Christ’s mission? Allow Mark’s gospel to inspire and challenge.

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of

1. In Year 3 of the Common Lectionary, Mark’s gospel is used in Advent, during Epiphany and during the Sundays after Pentecost, but rarely during Lent and Eastertide. Studying it only when it is a periscope misses its full scope.

2. I am using the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Mindful of those who do exegesis in English, I do not pursue the Greek in this article.

3. Mark was written for Christians in Rome, a place where being a person of action was admired, thus “immediately.” Some commentators say the use of “immediately” was simply Mark’s style of writing; however, “immediately” urges us to not linger at our own pace. There is no slowness about Christ’s action for those he serves. A servant needs to act quickly. Take notice of Jesus’ timeliness and urgency.

Through a theology of the cross *and* resurrection, immediately—now—we are called to action in the public world.

God” (1:1). Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark quickly begins the action. Like staging a drama, the curtain rises. Stage left: Isaiah the prophet appears, “Prepare the way of the Lord, . . .” (1:3). Stage right: John the baptizer appears in the wilderness. “The one who is more powerful than I is coming . . .” (1:7). Center stage: “Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” (1:9). Stage lights up: Jesus sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. Voice from heaven (God): “You are my Son, the Beloved; . . .” (1:11). Stage lights down: “The Spirit *immediately* drove him out into the wilderness” (1:12). In twelve verses the “beginning” drama is concluded with Jesus being tempted by Satan. For us who may often feel alone in the wilderness of the world, we are assured Jesus comes out into the wilderness with us.

Now Jesus’ ministry moves forward into the public world. We see “immediately” often. He called the first disciples to follow him and *immediately* Simon and Andrew left their fishing nets and followed (1:17-18). Jesus saw James and John and *immediately* called them (1:20). Jesus touched a leper and *immediately* the leprosy left him (1:40-42). Jesus healed and forgave the sins of a paralytic and *immediately* the man stood up and took up his mat (2:1-12). We witness vocation and healing.

The call to vocation includes *sending* disciples out into the world. “*Immediately* [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side,” (6:45). Jesus was not just in a hurry or compulsively busy—as we might interpret today—but purposefully urgent. He dismissed the crowd whom he had just fed, bid farewell, and “went up on the mountain to pray.” (6:46). He rested. After the second feeding story, Jesus “immediately got into the boat *with* his disciples . . .” (8:10). Jesus accompanies those he sends.

Jesus’ healing continues. He spoke to a deaf man with a speech

impediment and said, in private, "Be opened." *Immediately* his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly" (7:31-37). Three times we see "immediately" in the healing of a convulsing boy (9:14-29). The lengthy intertwining stories in 10:17-52 culminate in a beggar's *immediately* regaining his sight and following Jesus on the way (10:52). All this in Mark 1-10.⁴

In Chapters 11-16 Mark uses "immediately" sparingly. Jesus entered Jerusalem: "Go into the village... and *immediately*...you will find tied there a colt... 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here *immediately*'" (11:2-3). Then, the story itself becomes immediate for Jesus and for us. Only one last time in the NRSV⁵: "*Immediately*, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas"... came (14:43). Betrayal, arrest, denial, death.

Action against systemic evils

From the beginning drama, Jesus was confronted by Satan and was with the "wild beasts" (1:13). Evil was and will be ever and immediately present in Jesus' world and ours.

So easily we could ignore Mark's accounts of people being inhabited by evil spirits. Surely, we know better today. We take seriously mental conditions, seizures, addictions, and more; they are illnesses. Jesus takes people seriously! He did not dismiss serious conditions; he did not dismiss people. Jesus cares and frees people.

Jesus often commanded unclean spirits who then obeyed him (1:23-27). A man with an unclean spirit, naming Jesus, cried out, "What have you to do with us [plural], Jesus of Nazareth?" Jesus silenced the spirit; the man, convulsed by evil, was freed.

Another man with an unclean spirit *immediately* met Jesus (5:1-20). The man suffered, "always howling and bruising himself" (5:5). He bowed down before Jesus. Jesus: "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (5:8). The unclean spirit recognized Jesus and when asked his name, responded again in the plural, "My name is Legion; for we are many" (5:9). Plural indeed! Embodied evil, begging Jesus for release! "They" were released into swine and were drowned. The "demoniac" was now in his "right mind" (5:15). However, witnesses begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood. The freed man, wanting to be with Jesus, was told to go home and speak of God's mercy, which he did.

After Jesus' transfiguration, we see more violent embodied evil (9:14-29). "Someone from the crowd" brought to Jesus a child with a spirit that made him unable to speak. "When the spirit saw him [Jesus], *immediately* it convulsed the boy (9:20). The father

For us who may often feel alone in the wilderness of the world, we are assured Jesus comes out into the wilderness with us.

asked Jesus for help, "if you are able." Jesus: "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes." *Immediately*, the father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (9:22-24). Jesus commanded the spirit to come out and never enter the boy again. The spirit cried out, convulsing the boy terribly and the spirit came out. The boy looked dead until Jesus lifted him up and the child was able to stand (9:25-27).

Jesus also is confronted with evil enacted and with dangerous forces. We see the evil plan to behead John the Baptist (6:14-29). "Immediately Herodias rushed back to the king..." (6:25) and "Immediately the king sent a soldier...with orders to bring John's head" (6:27). A grudge, a plan, and murder.⁶ How quickly we, too, can knowingly or unknowingly participate in evil.

Jesus faced dangerous waters and wind. Jesus was on safe dry land; his disciples at sea, "straining at the oars against an adverse wind." He could have—intended to—pass by, but he *immediately* spoke to them, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." He "got into the boat *with* them and the wind ceased" (6:47-52). When people are afraid, compassionate Jesus is with them.

Jesus, as his crucifixion nears, prepared the disciples to face destruction, conspiracy,⁷ wars, rumors of wars, famines, and their own persecution (13:1-13). The list is open-ended. Times will never be "normal." In all times, Jesus calls and prepares disciples to take action against systemic evil.

Systemic sin is consistently and relentlessly present: injustice, racism, classism, sexism, and all the other "isms." We cannot pass by; we must act. Urgency calls for immediate compassion, wisdom, and courage because there are people everywhere who are in need and in danger.

Dare we confront ruling powers? What about the separation of church and state?⁸ The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in its constitution pledges to "work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction."⁹ The

4. Zoom Interview May 27, 2020, with Rev. Duncan R. Wielzen, Ph.D. The Hague, Netherlands: "Immediately means urgency, doing right without delay; Martin Luther King Jr. said that you cannot postpone doing right." Colleague Dr. Wielzen is parish priest and president of URI Europe Board, a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences.

5. The Greek word *euthus* is translated variously in different versions. In 14:72 and 15:1 in the NRSV it is translated as, "At that moment" the cock crowed and, "As soon as" the chief priests consulted and bound Jesus. However, the point is the same: *euthus* culminates in Jesus' being bound for death.

6. The disciples, taking John's body, "laid it in a tomb" (6:29). This foreshadows Jesus' dead body: "laid it in a tomb" (15:46).

7. Early on, "immediately" the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians on how to destroy Jesus (3:6). Herodias conspired against the Baptizer. Now Jesus faced conspiracy.

8. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that Congress shall not establish a religion, nor prohibit free exercise of religion [many religions]. That one sentence goes on to give people in a pluralistic society the freedom of speech, of the press, to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

9. John R. Stumme and Robert W. Tuttle, *Church and State*:

ELCA continues to issue Social Statements calling for action against systemic sin and systemic evil.¹⁰ We who have a theology of the cross and resurrection are freed to confront evil systems. This is being church for the sake of the world.

We confess we are all sinners; we face individual and communal sin also within churches. Mark tells us not to be surprised when we suffer denial, betrayal, even conspiracies (and when we participate in them). Jesus is with us, in the midst of anything.

"Immediately" is not used after the crucifixion. After the resurrection, time is marked in a new way: "When the sabbath was over," (16:1) and "very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen" (16:2).¹¹ The crucified and risen Christ empowers us for new beginnings.

Jesus the Teacher

Jesus as teacher is central in Mark. Christ's teaching was often proclamation, but there are no long sermons in Mark. We shall explore Jesus as teacher—his recognition and his teaching people to follow, witness, and heal. We observe his teaching authority, his methods, and where he taught. Listen for people's response, their "mere amazement" rather than deep understanding.

Jesus named and recognized

From God's, "You are my Son, the Beloved" (1:11) to the centurion's, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39), Jesus is named. From his baptism to his crucifixion Jesus' identity is proclaimed.

Jesus begins to teach in Mark 1:21-28. Christ's identity is closely linked to his being teacher. This soon becomes clear: "he began to teach..." (4:1); "He began to teach..." (4:2). The disciples called Jesus "Teacher" for the first time in 4:38, but their naming was accusatory, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Painful! Also painful for us when we are caringly teaching. Jesus, their teacher, is compassionate: "he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them... and he began to teach them many things" (6:34).

After teaching continually, Jesus finally asked the disciples who people thought he was, and then directly "Who do you say that I am?" (8:27-29). The Messiah! After the Transfiguration Peter calls Jesus, "Rabbi" (9:5). Soon a crowd member calls Jesus "Teacher" (9:17) and persists in asking for help. Almost always after the Transfiguration Jesus was recognized as "Teacher/Rabbi" (e.g., 9:38) by the disciples and the crowds.

But such naming is not without ironic complications. The man who begins, "Good teacher" in 10:17-22 could not deal with what

Urgency calls for immediate compassion, wisdom, and courage because there are people everywhere who are in need and in danger.

Jesus taught. The man defended himself, "Teacher, I have kept all these [commandments] from my youth." (10:20) and walked away. A hard text, but the compassionate teacher, "looking at him, loved him..." (10:21).

James and John audaciously requested, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Jesus: "What is you want me to do for you?" When they asked for privilege and glory, Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking," and added that was not for him to grant (10:35-40). Note that the intertwined stories in this 10:17-52 section conclude with Jesus asking the blind beggar with genuine needs the same (genuine) question, "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:51).

Confidently recognizing Jesus as teacher, during Christ's final week the disciples were noticing things, "Look, teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" (13:1). When Jesus needed a room for the Passover meal, he directed the disciples to say, "The Teacher asks..." for a room (14:12-16). They followed directions, but still did not know fully what following would mean.

Following Jesus

Yes, Jesus' call to vocation includes *sending* disciples out into the world. The disciples followed their teacher as he taught and healed. He sent them out two by two, giving them authority (6:6-7). They returned and told Jesus "all that they had done and taught" (6:30).

Following the teacher included denying their own path and taking up their cross (8:34). The disciples' final call to follow their teacher ends in Gethsemane where, "All of them deserted him and fled" (14:50). Notice: we see others who had been following the teacher, unnoticed and unnamed: "There were also women looking on from a distance... These used to follow him... and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem" (15:40-41).

Teaching authority

Jesus referred to but did not rely on sources; he taught on his own authority. Immediately after calling the disciples in Chapter 1, Jesus, on the sabbath, "entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (1:21-22). Jesus appointed and named the apostles to teach, proclaim, and "have authority to cast out demons" (3:14-15). His teaching and theirs (ours, too?) was for authoritative action in the world.

Jesus' authority was quickly challenged. In his hometown,

Lutheran Perspectives (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 51.

10. "Unclean spirit" is used most often in Mark. "Sin" is used in Mark 9 (If the hand, foot or eye causes you to sin...) and "sins" in chapters 1, 2 and 3 (Jesus has the authority to forgive sins). "Evil" is used in chapters 7, 9, and 15.

11. Discussion about the shorter and longer endings to the Gospel of Mark is beyond the scope of this article. I focus on the shorter ending. However, note the final verse, 16:20, "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere."

while teaching on the sabbath, many asked, "Where did this man get all of this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him?" (6:2). People recognized him only as "the carpenter," and "took offense" (6:3). After Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the chief priests, scribes, and elders directly challenged, "By what authority are you doing these things?" The religious "authorities" did not have answers for Jesus' questions, argued with each other, and were afraid of the crowd, so they said, "We do not know." Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." (11:27-33). Shortly after, Jesus denounced the scribes (12:38-40).

Jesus' teaching was offensive earlier when "he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected... and be killed" (8:31-32). It was offensive because it challenged their concepts about God—so will ours. It challenged the ways of the world and earthly powers—so will ours. It would lead to the cross—so will ours (Christ's cross). When the time came for betrayal and arrest, Jesus said, "Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled" (14:49).

Where Jesus taught

Jesus taught by the sea, in villages, in the synagogue and temple, at home, and privately to his disciples. He taught in diverse places among all types of people.

Already in Mark 1:21 we see Jesus teaching on the sabbath in the synagogue. Already in Mark 2:1-2 we see large crowds wanting to hear him teach: "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." Already in 2:13 Jesus was beside the sea: "the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them." He went *by* boat and crowds came to hear (6:31-34). Jesus taught *in* a boat in the stormy sea (4:36-41).

Jesus taught in his hometown (6:1) and in many other villages (6:6). He taught Peter, James, and John on the way down from the mountain where he was transfigured (9:9-13). Jesus continued on the move: "He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Crowds again gathered" ... (10:1).

Jesus taught his disciples "in the house" (10:10). The disciples had private conversations when they could ask their Teacher deeper questions. "When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple" (13:3-8), Jesus answered privately their questions about what was coming.

Jesus was not just an "itinerant" teacher in a "wandering around aimlessly" sense. His itinerancy was his whole world.¹² We are called to teach everywhere: in small groups, within the whole congregation, in the community, and with voice in the public world. Do we doubt we will be heard? We will!

12. Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 9. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said to not make the parish your world but to make the world your parish.

Jesus' teaching was offensive... because it challenged their concepts about God—so will ours. It challenged the ways of the world and earthly powers—so will ours.

Educational methods and understanding

In various places among diverse people, what methods should we use? How did Jesus teach? How did people learn, understand, and grow in their ability to witness and work in the world?¹³

People came to Jesus with questions (e.g., 2:18). Jesus did not ask, "Guess what I'm thinking" questions as, mistakenly, some teachers today do. That does not engage people in real discussion but only makes them try to guess what's on the teacher's mind. Jesus listened as people engaged him.

Jesus used parables to teach, not believing they could learn only through "simple" stories. His parables invited thinking (3:23-27; 4:2-9; 4:21-25; 4:26-29).¹⁴ He expected people to listen and learn: "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (4:9). However, people often did not understand: "Do you not understand this parable?" (4:13), so Jesus afterward would explain the meaning to the disciples (4:13-20). Jesus wanted the disciples to understand God's unconditional love and be freed for reflective, courageous action (4:33).¹⁵

Jesus said, "To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God" (4:11). The puzzling "secret" in Mark's gospel, the "Messianic Secret," I believe is not just to keep a secret, nor to be exclusive, nor to avoid early death. His identity was publicly made known early, and Jesus went forward to the cross. Pointedly, in order for people to clearly teach about Jesus and carry out their vocation, they must deeply understand. When the disciples only partly understood Jesus' full identity, "He sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him" (8:30). We need to study, learn, and understand who Jesus is to be fully equipped for liberating

13. Ibid., See Chapter 3, "Eight Facets of Learning: Methodologies for a Diverse People." There is a theology of methodology. See also Chapter 7, "From Learning to Mission to Learning." Teachers often ask themselves only "How well did I do?" There are really four more questions to ask: "Did the learners hear and understand?" "Did the participants incorporate learnings and grow?" "Are the learners better equipped to carry out their vocation?" "Were the participants able to serve people so that others might know and experience God's gracious love?" 260.

14. Duncan R. Wielzen, "Jesus used parables to meet people where they were... Jesus did not teach for teaching's sake; people have a quest for understanding. We need to connect that quest with communal life, making a difference in the world."

15. Study once again the classic, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). The essence of education is freedom which includes being engaged in praxis and action/reflection.

ministry. Otherwise we either mislead people or participate in a complicity of silence in the face of real-world needs. Once we understand, we must tell. Frequently those who have been healed are those who witness.

Jesus taught straight forward, giving direct instruction: "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another" (9:50). Jesus taught all ages with compassion, just as he took a little child in his arms and taught (9:36).¹⁶ He had compassion on the crowds that had been hearing him teach and *fed* them (6:30-44 and 8:1-10).¹⁷

And Jesus became frustrated—not because he was tired of preparing lesson plans, but because he cared about people's understanding. Right after the feeding accounts, the disciples forgot to bring bread. Jesus: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? ... Do you not remember?" (how many they had helped feed). "Do you not yet understand?" (8:14-21).

Adversaries watched Jesus' actions and sought to accuse him; he often responded with a question (3:4). Enemies "questioned" Jesus, not to learn but to entrap. The Pharisees asked for a sign "to test him" (8:11). In 10:2 the Pharisees, "came to test him." They questioned "to trap" Jesus; he directly asked, "Why are you putting me to the test?" (12:13-17).¹⁸ When Sadducees asked questions to entrap, Jesus said, they were "wrong," "quite wrong" because they knew "neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (12:18-27).

Hearing "disputing," a scribe "seeing that he [Jesus] answered well" (12:28) asked him questions. After Jesus responded about the commandments and love, the scribe said, "You are right, Teacher;" (12:32). "When Jesus saw that he [the scribe] answered wisely, Jesus said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question" (12:34). Finally, when Jesus was falsely accused before the chief priests, (14:53-65) the high priest asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" "But he [Jesus] was silent and did not answer" (14:60-61). Jesus was spit upon, struck, and beaten.

The disciples themselves sometimes said, "No" to Jesus' teachings, often being quiet because they didn't understand. When Jesus began to teach his disciples "quite openly" about his suffering to come, "Peter took him [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me Satan!'" (8:31-33).

When they came down from the mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John questioned only among themselves. No questions of Jesus, they "kept the matter to themselves" because they could not yet understand what "rising from the dead" could mean (9:9-10).

The disciples, arguing among themselves about who was

16. Jesus had strong words for those who neglect caringly teaching children (9:42-48): millstones, tearing off body parts.

17. Jesus had compassion for the crowds because, "they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." (6:34, feeding of the 5,000) and compassion because he knew they were hungry (8:2, feeding of the 4,000).

18. Testing students has a long history in education. Jesus did not give tests. Reconsider: Why do we test? Why do we grade people?

“[T]hey needed to understand,] whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” I am amazed at the disciples’ “mere amazement.” I should not be. Why did Jesus’ appearance, teaching, and healing cause amazement?

greatest, were silent in front of Jesus (9:34-35). Jesus was clear: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (10:43-45).¹⁹

Merely amazed

I am amazed at the disciples’ “mere amazement.” I should not be. This is an important theme in Mark. Why did Jesus’ appearance, teaching, and healing cause amazement? Not just in one instance, but throughout the Gospel, amazement and astonishment are a significant pattern. The Greek word *ekplesso* means astonished: “struck with amazement.” Amazement is being alarmed, distressed, troubled, even shocked, bewildered, and overwhelmed. Jesus’ astonishing signs are always in service to his teaching about God’s amazing action in the world.

Already in Mark 1:22 when Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, people “were astounded at this teaching...” and “amazed” (1:27). He healed and taught forgiveness of sins; people were “amazed and glorified God,” (2:12). People were alarmed when they saw Jesus’ action against evil. A freed demoniac begins to proclaim, “how much Jesus had done for him” but the crowd is “amazed” (5:20). “Many” who heard Jesus “teach in the synagogue” were “astounded” (6:2). In Mark 7:37 people “were astounded beyond measure,” and in 9:15 the crowd was “immediately overcome with awe.” Pharisees, (who had tried to entrap him with their questions) were “utterly amazed” at Jesus’ comprehensive answer (12:17). In the end, when Jesus was silent against his accusers, Pilate was “amazed” (15:5).

The disciples sometimes said, “No” to Jesus’ teaching. Their reaction of astonishment I call “mere” amazement because they

19. This heart of servant leadership is stated in Martin Luther’s *Treatise on Christian Liberty*. “A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 251.

did not understand. Therefore, they could not yet witness, proclaim, or teach in Christ's name. After the Transfiguration, Peter "did not know what to say for they [James and John, too] were terrified" (9:6). In Mark 10:23-27 the disciples were "perplexed" and "greatly astounded." But shortly afterward when they were "amazed" and "afraid," Jesus "took the twelve aside again and began to tell them..." (10:32). Christians today frequently are afraid and cannot or will not speak: "We don't know what to say." Pastors, deacons, and all others who teach need to help people move beyond their fear/astonishment/amazement to deep understanding so they can courageously speak and act in the world.

Understanding is connected with belief. The father who saw Jesus heal his son "cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'" (9:24). After Jesus was arrested, poignantly Peter is driven to denial of his association with Jesus: "he denied it, saying 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.'" (14:68). After the second denial, Peter "broke down and wept." (14:72).

The shorter ending of Mark's gospel does not remove the fear and amazement (16:1-8).²⁰ "When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome" continued being committed followers. However, the Resurrection itself leaves them yet not fully understanding. They were "alarmed." The white-robed young man said, "Do not be alarmed." (16:5-6). Jesus had been raised. The women were commissioned to go and tell. "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." (16:8).

Spirited Action in the World

In the midst of issues such as systemic racism, economic inequality, white supremacist movements, gun violence, global health issues and climate crisis, it is insufficient for us to be merely amazed or astonished. The world is filled with fear. How do we act immediately in the midst of uncertainty? This was the disciples' dilemma and is ours as well.²¹

In the midst of issues such as systemic racism, economic inequality, white supremacist movements, gun violence, global health issues and climate crisis, it is insufficient for us to be merely amazed or astonished. The world is filled with fear. How do we act immediately in the midst of uncertainty? This was the disciples' dilemma and is ours as well.

Teaching from Mark's gospel compels us to move from complacency to urgency. In lifelong learning, we are called to listen, hear the cries of the oppressed, ask questions, and more deeply understand. Action/reflection propels us toward ongoing discernment of servant leader vocation in our individual and communal ministry in daily life. When we become overwhelmed, we turn to a Cross and Resurrection theology. Christ's body, the Church, calls. The world's needs and the earth itself call. With Mark's "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ ... (1:1), we each day begin again as participants in Gospel action.

20. The longer ending of Mark tries to "complete" the story through adding resurrection appearances, commissioning, and the Ascension. The themes raised in this article do not carry through in the longer ending.

21. Specific complex issues in specific time and place contexts change constantly. While writing this article, we face global pandemics of COVID-19 and racial inequality.