
Introduction:

Teaching and Preaching the Gospel of Mark

In Year B, the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) focuses on the Gospel of Mark. Its treatment of Mark poses a challenge to teachers and preachers who have learned, or are learning, to engage the RCL's selected passages from the perspective of the Gospel as a whole. The seasons of the liturgical year govern the RCL's structure, not the narrative structure of the Gospel. As a result, the RCL must slice-and-dice and disassemble the Gospel's narrative. That requires the teacher and preacher to practice the discipline of reading each selection from the Gospel within the Gospel itself—not a novel idea, but one that is not obvious from the RCL. Essays in this issue offer teachers and preachers reading strategies for meeting this challenge. At the same time, these essays suggest possible movements from the narrative and historical world of the Gospel of Mark to the tasks of teaching and preaching the Gospel in today's world, especially as it is being shaped by the 2016 U.S. election.

David J. Lull explores three horizons for engaging the Gospel of Mark in Year B of the RCL: 1) the lectionary itself, 2) the narrative of the Gospel of Mark and the Greco-Roman world behind it, and 3) the preacher's and congregation's world. Preachers and readers will differ in their emphasis on these three horizons and on the relative weight they give to each of them.

Joanna Dewey describes the first-century media world, the characteristics of oral media, and ways to recapture some of the oral impact of the whole Gospel of Mark in spite of the way the lectionary treats it. **Jan Schnell Rippentrop** shows how Mark 14:1–15:47 (for Palm/Passion Sunday) “reveals a political theology of Christian resistance and resilience in the face of political ineptitude and coercion.” **O. Wesley Allen Jr.** urges preachers to stick with Mark 16:1–8 on Easter Sunday, instead of the alternative in the Gospel of John, and to find a message of hope in its odd ending.

James L. Bailey faces squarely the challenge of preaching on two miracle stories, Mark 4:35–41 and 5:21–43 (for the Fifth and Sixth Sundays after Pentecost), which call readers and listeners of this story to live lives based, not on fear, but on faithful trust in Jesus. **Ronald J. Allen** explores how Mark 8:27–38 (for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost), a text at the fulcrum in this Gospel, can help people “understand the meaning of their suffering and to endure it.”

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon shows how to read the story about the poor widow in Mark 12:38–44 (for the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost) “from the inside out, from a close reading of the story itself, to its immediate Markan context, to its wider Markan contexts.” She concludes that Jesus points to a three-times marginalized person—a *woman* who is *poor* and *widowed*—as a model disciple, who sacrificially gives, not just her money, but her whole life to others.

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Of course, these essays do not cover all of the Gospel of Mark in Year B of the RCL. Instead, they offer treatments of readings for Palm/Passion Sunday (Jan Schnell Rippentrop) and Easter Sunday (O. Wesley Allen)—the RCL turns to other Gospels for the other “high Sundays and seasons”—and of readings during the season of Pentecost that illustrate approaches to “miracle stories” (James L. Bailey) and what some have called “pronouncement stories” (Elizabeth Struthers Malbon). In short, these essays offer teachers and preachers examples of reading strategies that they can adapt to the RCL's selection of texts in the Gospel of Mark.

In our **Listening to Immigrant Voices** feature, Héctor Garfias-Toledo reflects on the experiences of immigrants from Mexico from the perspective of our proclivity to stereotype others and put them in boxes. His own experiences in the U.S. transcend such categories, as do the particular stories of every single person who comes to this country. Jesus is our hope who, through his life, death, and resurrection, teaches us a new way of being in relationship with others beyond such “boxing behaviors.” The reader is encouraged to see others, including immigrants, as children of God who happen to have been born in another part of this world that God created for all as valued children of God.

Liesbet Duerinck Van Gysegem proposes in the **Currents Focus** essay that a ritual for women after childbirth ought to foster community, hold ambiguity, and center the mother's experience through the theme of baptism. This makes such a ritual serve as rite of passage and healing. The ritual calls on the pastoral sensitivity of the ministerial leader to make adaptations, so that the particular proposed design does not become inflexibly normative. The author suggests that symbols or images that function as a remembrance of baptism are well suited for this purpose.

We are grateful for the thoughtful introduction to the lectionary provided by our contributors to **Preaching Helps**, under the excellent editing of Barbara Lundblad. May the Spirit direct our preaching and teaching of these texts as we move into the new church year, centered on the Gospel of Mark!

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