

I am writing this in the midst of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Having discussed with my sister, who is an Anglican, what I am going to write it occurred to me that we share readings of this year B not only with Catholics worldwide but with all who use the Common Lectionary, which itself used our Catholic lectionary as a basis. Whether we think of our Anglican friends here in Ipswich, those who worship at Christchurch or at Museum Street Methodist, to name but a few churches, we are one in the Gospel we hear on Sunday!

Year B began at the start of Advent yet in eight weeks we have only heard Mark on three Sundays. Why?

One of those readings one was about the last days, which is typical at the start of Advent. Another was about the beginning of the good news. In Matthew and Luke we hear the familiar stories of the angel visiting Mary, her visit to Elizabeth, the birth of Jesus and the visits of the shepherds and the wise men. We heard these over Christmas, but from Matthew and Luke because Mark does not have birth narratives, but does tell us in 1:1 about the good news/gospel (*euangelion* in Greek, hence evangelist) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Another reading was about John the Baptist, but this was supplemented with extra material from John. The third was about the baptism of our Lord, which I intend to look at when we read about the Transfiguration.

From week 3 until the second Sunday of Lent we shall read the remainder of Mark 1 then about the Transfiguration in Lent 2. As in other years there is a gap until after Ascension Day, except that this Easter the Passion will be from Mark. We return to Mark in June but there is a gap from 25 July to 22 August. Why? Very simple: Mathew has 28 chapters and Luke 24 but Mark has only 16 which cannot be stretched out over a year, so we have a period in the summer reading John 6!

I hope that makes reasonable sense but am summarising the readings at the end for anyone who wants the pattern.

As well as being the shortest gospel, Mark is nowadays thought by almost all scholars to be the earliest gospel, and to have been used by both Matthew and Luke, alongside other material, some common to each and other special to Matthew and to Luke. The three are known as Synoptic gospels. John comes from a different source but of course there is a lot in common in terms of the events.

Mark 1:1, as stated above, tells us what the good news is, and then refers fairly briefly to John the Baptist and the baptism of our Lord, which I shall return to later. His reference to the temptation of our Lord is also very brief. A key verse then follows! In 1:15 we are told what the proclamation of the good news is:

- The time is fulfilled, i.e. what had been expected for ages by the prophets is now about to happen
- The kingdom of God i.e. God's kingly reign, has come near
- Just as in the teaching of John the Baptist, the call of Jesus is for people to repent of their sins

- More is required: belief in the good news, that 1:1 tells us is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As you read the gospel, look at who recognises Jesus for who he is, and who does not.

Before continuing we need to note an important little word used 42 times by Mark but only 12 in the other gospels, it is just five letters in Greek (εὐθὺς and is translated as immediately, at once, as soon as or straightaway, depending on the translation you use. Mark 1 uses it ten times. It is significant in later parts of the gospel such as the Passion narrative, so just be aware!

Mark 1:16-20 is the call of the first four disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John, who were fishermen but whose new role was to be fishers of men i.e. as disciples or followers of Jesus instead of looking for fish they were to be followers of Jesus, looking for followers by proclaiming the good news. They responded immediately.

The remainder of Mark 1 can be seen as a typical day in the life of Jesus.

- (a) This took place in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a lake. He taught in the synagogue there and cast out unclean spirits. Note use of the word immediately and also in 1:24 the unclean spirit knew who Jesus was. People were amazed.
- (b) Jesus heals the sick, here Simon's mother in law, again use of immediately. It could have been malaria.
- (c) Sick and demon possessed were brought at sunset, after Sabbath had ended. Jesus told the demons not to speak, because they knew who he was.
- (d) Jesus prayed alone, but needed to explain to the disciples what he was doing, continuing proclaiming his message in the synagogues throughout Galilee and casting out demons
- (e) This time a leper is healed, once more immediately. Maybe you have read Victoria Hislop's book *The Island* about leprosy in Spinalonga. It was deadly but today can be treated with antibiotics, but still exists. The correct procedure if someone was cured was to go to the priest.
- (f) Jesus continued to preach but had to stay outside town, maybe to escape problems as well as the crowd.

In Mark 2-3 which are not included in the lectionary there are various examples of opposition to Jesus.

Readings from Mark in Year B

Advent 1 -2 nd Sunday of the Yea	Mk 13:33-7; 1:1-11
24 Jan -28 Feb	Mk 1:14-45 and 9:2-10
Passion reading	Mk 14:1-15:37
Ascension	Mk 16:15-20
I may have missed Mk 16:1-14!	
13 June -18 July	Mk 4:26-6:34
29 August -14 November	Mk 7:1-13:24