**Lectionary readings and themes to the end of Year B with a focus on Mark’s Gospel**

**Reading Mark**

The problem with the way we read scripture is we tend to read short passages at a time. Sometimes a theme or series is discernible over several readings but it is easy to take each story as separate and unrelated. This is not how the writer intended the story to be heard.

As with all texts, it is important to follow the story as told by the writer. The story has beginnings, endings, highlights, twists and turns and even at times puzzles for discernment. Mark is no different (and neither are the Epistles).

With this in mind, if you want to get a sense of what the writer of Mark is getting at, it is important to read the book through in a single sitting (if possible). This is reinforced with developing a sense of the structure of the book by noting key themes and points as they develop.

Along the way, look for summary statements e.g. Mark 1:21 & 22 *21They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* Such statements either point to key things said about what has gone before or what is about to come. They give insight into the point/s Mark wants you to notice.

When considering a specific passage, consider the passages before and after. Note summary passages that occur and even inserted stories or points that look like a diversion e.g. the story of John the Baptist’s death at the hand of Herod in Mark 6:14 – 29. Many of these passages are not included in the lectionary reading but are important for an understanding of the passage you are considering.

**Some points of background:**

* Most (not all) scholars believe Mark was the first Gospel written.
* Most (not all) scholars think Mark was written around 60 – 70 AD.
* Mark’s was the first to write a “gospel”. This was in contrast to the Roman Emperors’ publications that claimed to be “gospel” – good news.
* No one knows who wrote the Gospel. Later tradition attached it to Mark and Peter but never with great confidence.
* Most scholars agree that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a basis for their Gospels. They also used other sources.
* It is also generally thought that John was written later again but using other material and for a different community.
* Each Gospel was written for a different church community for a different purpose. For this reason each Gospel needs to be understood in their own right. Comparing and contrasting is useful in clarifying the different emphasis and concerns.

**A brief guide to preparing and reading a passage**

Before you begin considering each passage, try to put aside the way you may have heard each passage used in the past. Follow the instructions below for each passage on their own before moving to the next passage.

1) Read each passage slowly and carefully several times. It may help to read each one aloud at least once.

2) Record your questions about each passage.

3) Make notes about the structure of each passage.

4) Note the themes present leading up to and after each passage i.e. the context of the story and its place in Mark’s development of his story of Jesus.

5) Note any common themes between the passages. How are they similar and/or different?

6) Are their other Biblical passages that have links to any of these passages, either as quotes, references and/or similar points and themes addressed?

**Engaging the passages**

Before reading the passages below, also read their preceding passages. The themes in them feed into these.

Once you have identified the themes and issues, ask what is Mark trying to say about them? Are these themes significant today? In what way are they similar and different? Are there stories of our era/your experience that compare either positively or negatively?

Prior to the following readings there have been stories of conflict between Jesus and religious leaders over tradition and God’s commandment, a story of a Gentile woman of faith and Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah but not understanding. These are just the lectionary stories.

There have been several other stories told between each of these including the feeding of 4,000, the Pharisees don’t understand and demand a sign, the disciples don’t understand Jesus’ use of euphemisms the healing of a blind man in two steps. Jesus is transformed in front of 3 disciples but they don’t understand. There is also an association of Jesus with Elijah and the affirmation of God – *listen to him.* (You may recall the story a couple of weeks early of the deaf and dumb man who was healed to be able to hear perfectly and speak plainly.) There is also the story of the difficulty of the other disciples to heal a young boy whose father struggles with his faith. In the struggle he still asks for help.

Themes of conflict, people who should understand not understanding (both disciples and religious leaders), Jesus requiring who he is to be kept secret, what true holiness is, who the real disciples are is really very surprising and the nature of the reign of God. There is a challenge to listen, see and thereby understand. These themes continue in the following Mark stories.

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| [**Proper 20 (25)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=220) Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 23, 2018 | [Proverbs 31:10-31](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=220) A capable wife [Psalm 1](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=220) Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord | [James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=220) The wisdom from above | [**Mark 9:30-37**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=220) **Who is the greatest? Welcome the child among you.**  A summary statement; the keeping secret what is to happen; the placing of a child in the centre; welcoming a child is like welcoming Jesus (and even the Father); the first last and the last first.  Questions: who understands? Who is at the centre? |
| [**Proper 21 (26)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=221) Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 30, 2018 | [Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=221) Esther obtains relief for her people [Psalm 124](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=221) Our help is in the name of the Lord | [James 5:13-20](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=221) The prayer of faith | [**Mark 9:38-50**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=221) **Whoever is not against us is for us**  Who’s side are you on; working with God; working with those working for Jesus; caring for those who share in the mission; caring for “little ones”…  Questions: the statement “whoever is not against us is for us” contrasts from Luke’s version. There is an emphasis here of working together in peace and not seeing others as rivals in the mission/ministry. |
| [**Proper 22 (27)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=222) Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 7, 2018 | [Job 1:1, 2:1-10](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=222) Satan given permission to test Job [Psalm 26](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=222) Song for a man of integrity | [Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=222) Creation subject to human beings and to Christ | [**Mark 10:2-16**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=222) **Marriage, divorce and children in the Kingdom**  v1 (omitted here) is a summary statement.  Conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders; adultery committed by the divorcer not the divorcee; again the reign of God entered by being child-like; themes of power and the meek  Note: the child is one who listens, learns, grows and trusts. The child is not the powerful one but the dependent one. |
| [**Proper 23 (28)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=223) Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 14, 2018 | [Job 23:1-9, 16-17](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=223) God has made my heart faint [Psalm 22:1-15](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=223) My God, my God why have you forsaken me | [Hebrews 4:12-16](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=223) The Word of God is living and active, sharper than a sword | [**Mark 10:17-31**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=223) **Sell what you have and give to the poor**  Again there are themes of power vs being meek for entering the reign of God when we are powerful/wealthy is difficult; the disciples given up all for Jesus; Jesus highlights there is reward in doing so  Question: what is “eternal life” for Mark?  Again comes the themes of giving up all and becoming as children – are they the same thing said in different ways? |
| [**Proper 24 (29)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=224) Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 21, 2018 | [Job 38:1-7, (34-41)](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=224) The greatness of God in creation [Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=224) In your wisdom you have made them all | [Hebrews 5:1-10](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=224) The reverent submission of Christ as a high priest | [**Mark 10:35-45**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=224) **The cup that I drink you will drink**  Notice the missed passages vv32-34: fear and awe have descended now on those following Jesus and there is a separation developing; Jesus predicting his death and betrayal  Despite what has been said about service, the disciple still want to be on the top; the cost of getting there is not the way thought; leaders must serve  Question: how is service here different from how service of leaders is spoken of today? |
| [**Proper 25 (30)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=225) Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost October 28, 2018 | [Job 42:1-6, 10-17](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=225) The Lord restored the fortunes of Job [Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22)](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=225) O taste and see that the Lord is good | [Hebrews 7:23-28](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=225) Christ holds his priesthood permanently | [**Mark 10:46-52**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=225) **Jesus heals the blind beggar Bartimeaus**  The blind man sees; he seeks sight and is given it; he expresses insight and faith prior to his healing – “Son of David”; he becomes the model disciple  Notice the contrast here between the sighted ones from previous passages who don’t see but here a blind person who seeks sight does see. Notice also that the healing here is in one go in contrast to the 2 steps earlier 8:22 – 26. Question: what point is Mark making in this development? |
| [**Proper 26 (31)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=227) Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost November 4, 2018 | [Ruth 1:1-18](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=227) Where you go I will go [Psalm 146](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=227) Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord O my soul! | [Hebrews 9:11-14](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=227) Christ offered himself without blemish to God | [**Mark 12:28-34**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=227) **Which is the greatest commandment?**  Notice what has been omitted in the lectionary – the entry into Jerusalem; the Temple clearing; the question of Jesus’ authority; a parable about evil tenants; taxes; teaching regarding resurrection  Here in the midst of conflict and misunderstanding, one person gets it – what is central to the reign of God; the teacher’s commentary takes it beyond the usual and he understands and is affirmed  This passage becomes a significant highlight and contrast to what has gone before and is to come. |
| [**Proper 27 (32)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=228) Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost November 11, 2018 | [Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=228) Ruth marries Boas [Psalm 127](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=228) Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labour in vain | [Hebrews 9:24-28](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=228) Christ removed sin by the sacrifice of himself once for all | [**Mark 12:38-44**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=228) **Beware of the scribes! The poor widow put in more.**  Again notice what has been omitted – religious leader not understanding – a question of authority.  The values above not appreciated by the religious leaders as shown with their use of money; it is contrasted to one who is poor and considered unimportant  Question: what really matters? Where is justice and integrity? How are values reversed by Jesus? |
| [**Proper 28 (33)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=229) Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost November 18, 2018 | [1 Samuel 1:4-20](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=229) Hannah's prayer is answered with the birth of Samuel [1 Samuel 2:1-10](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=229)\*\* Hannah's song: 'My heart exults in the Lord.' | [Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=229) We have a great high priest | [**Mark 13:1-8**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=229) **About the end; beware that no one leads you astray**  This passage is only a short glimpse of Mark’s “apocalypse”. Apocalyptic writing highlights not prediction but that God is still in charge. It is an encouragement in the midst of suffering and oppression to persist in faith and to stay attuned to God’s work and reign. There is a stark contrast to what people think is important (the Temple buildings) and what God wants (see Mark 12:28ff, & 38ff).  Remember Jesus to face suffering but so too are the disciples. Question: what is the challenge? |
| [**Reign of Christ - Proper 29 (34)**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=230) Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost November 25, 2018 | [2 Samuel 23:1-7](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=230) The last words of David [Psalm 132:1-12, (13-18)](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=230) O Lord remember in David's favour  or Psalm 93 The Lord is King, he is robed in majesty | [Revelation 1:4b-8](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=230) To Christ be glory and dominion for forever and ever! | [**John 18:33-37**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=230) **Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'**  This passage is a stark departure from Mark into a whole different theme. Christ the King Sunday was established by rulers of the church in much more recent times. It could be argued it reflects a ruler’s interest. Question: is there a conflict with that and what we have been reading in Mark?  Yet: John points Jesus’ reign differs; there are questions of control and fear. Interestingly in the current era, the lectionary does not include Pilate’s question: “what is truth?” – a cynical question to a leader by a leader where things don’t suit. Any parallels today?!!! |