

“Post it on Your Heart”

Mark’s Gospel is the shortest of the Gospels. It is quite obvious how compact it is when we compare today’s reading with Matthew and Luke. What Mark says in six verses it takes Matthew twenty-two verses to cover. It takes Luke sixteen verses to cover the same story and he does not touch on the heart of Jesus’ message as the other two do. (See attachment.)

Mark specializes in economy of words. While the other two give us more detail of Jesus’ experience, Mark’s description can serve another purpose. Mark’s few verses offer a believer the straightforward route to living the gospel. I think of these few verses as the refrigerator door or mirror reminder of living in Christ. It is like when we start a new exercise routine or diet. We create a list of what it is we need to do in the simplest terms. We take that list and tape it to the fridge or bathroom mirror. Or we do like my sister does and put post-it notes everywhere—kitchen cabinets, doors, coffeemaker, inside drawers, on top of other post-its until there is nowhere to turn without seeing one of those little yellow notes reminding you of what you are supposed to be doing.

Here is the plan for a nascent Christian as Mark maps it out through Jesus’ experience.

1. Leave home
2. Get baptized
3. Recognize that baptism involves a special calling from God
4. Spend time meditating and praying on how to respond to the call.
5. Take that call into the world proclaiming God’s Good News.

Five steps that is all there is to it. We may even think we have a head start as we have already left home or been baptized. Perhaps we have, but I think these steps are a bit more than they seem on the surface.

Looking at them in order we might think that leaving home is done. But I believe that leaving home is more than the physical act of exiting the place of our birth. It means leaving a place of safety and security. That is what Jesus did when he ventured out into the world to receive the baptism of John. I do not think he knew what it he was in for, but he knew it was something that he needed to do.

Sure enough as he rises from the water of baptism he hears a voice saying “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” We believe this to be the voice of God, but we do not know what Jesus believed. I think the voice was startling. It certainly was so powerful that he was driven into the wilderness. There he was tempted by Satan, surrounded by wild beasts, and waited on by angels. When he went into the wilderness I doubt he knew what to expect. Perhaps he knew he would encounter beasts, but the temptation of Satan and the comfort of angels may have been a surprise.

Whatever he expected, when he completed his sojourn in the wilderness of fasting and prayer he came out the other side knowing what he was called to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel of God. He told anyone who would listen,

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Thus following Mark’s Gospel we have a model for our call.

1. Leave your comfort zone crossing through the liminal space¹ into the unknown.
2. Enter the new and unknown place into which God is calling you.
3. Listen for God’s voice.
4. Pray and meditate on God’s call in this new place.
5. Take the message you receive into the world the best way you can.

Cut out this list and post it where you will see it daily. Live into each of the five steps. Don’t skip any. It is the process that matters. You should also be ready to start over when it seems that step five may be done or that God’s call is changing. The journey is never finished. God’s call may change as we mature or find ourselves in a new situation.

We don’t have to be Jesus to follow his model as set out by Mark. We just need to keep Jesus in our sights. When we do we will be answering a call to greater life in this world and in the kingdom that is drawing near.

¹ See the sermon for February 14 for a discussion of liminal space.

Parallels in the Synoptic Gospels

Mark 1:9-11 about 70 A.D.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Matthew 3:13-17 about 85 A.D.

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Luke 3:21, 22 about 85 A.D.

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

John about 90-120 A.D.



Mark 1:12, 13

Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'he will command his angels concerning you; and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"

And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.