



## *A Reckless Faith: Studies in the Gospel of Mark*

### *Some suggestions for facilitators*

Welcome to this opportunity for ministry! Serving as a facilitator as people reflect together about matters of faith is a service to the Church. Blessings to you in this role.

***A Reckless Faith: Studies in the Gospel of Mark:*** This DVD series consists of six short lectures by The Rev. Dr. Fred Horton of Wake Forest Divinity School on different aspects of the Gospel of Mark. It provides a wonderful opportunity to deepen one's understanding of the Gospel of Mark as well as one's faith by exploring the questions and challenges raised by Dr. Horton.

There are six lectures in the series (with times):

- *A Reckless Faith: Introduction* (14:56)
- *He Healed Many Sick People* (18:32)
- *Your Sins are Forgiven* (12:18)
- *Jesus' Graduate School of Discipleship* (11:32)
- *The Death of Jesus* (13:22)
- *The Resurrection of Jesus* (14:46)

The School of Ministry previously released a written resource by Dr. Fred Horton, also entitled *A Reckless Faith: Studies in the Gospel of Mark*. This written resource was originally prepared for religion students at Wake Forest Divinity School and provides further depth beyond the material covered in the DVD lectures. The written resource may, if desired, be used in conjunction with the DVD series (or by itself). The DVD series may also be used by itself. We have outlined below in more detail some suggestions for how to use both of these offerings most effectively.

***Suggestions for how to use this material:*** How this material is used depends on the nature of the group in which they are used. We have outlined suggestions for three different groups:

- 1) An advanced group (clergy, theology school students or graduates);
- 2) An intermediate group (people who have committed to a Bible study group, like an Education for Ministry group);
- 3) And a group of adults interested in a beginner's approach to studying the Bible (people attending an adult forum on Sunday mornings).

**Advanced Group:** The written resource and the DVD lectures could be combined to provide the foundation for a long-term, in-depth refresher course on the Gospel of Mark. Such a group may want to focus on one chapter from the written material and the corresponding DVD lecture each month for a total of six months or even every other month for an entire year. In such a setting, this resource could provide fodder for scholarly discussions as well as personal reflection on the Gospel of Mark. As it is assumed such a group would have experience with facilitating adult groups, we have not outlined a format in

detail. However, we have provided a list of questions for each segment of the series that would be appropriate for an advanced group. These questions are not exhaustive and people should feel free to draw on other resources. The questions may be found towards the end of this guide immediately before the list of additional resources on the Gospel of Mark. You may also find some of the questions written for the beginner and intermediate groups useful. After all, regardless of our level of education questions are meant to reach us where we are.

**Intermediate Group:** Though the written resource should be accessible for anyone in an intermediate group, the DVD series would likely serve as the more appropriate foundation for such a group. We would suggest providing copies of the written resource for everyone in the group to use, if they so chose, but would not suggest it be required. The DVD lectures provide sufficient material for discussion and reflection, allowing the written resource to provide extra material for anyone with the time and desire to take their study further. A suggested structure along with discussion questions is outlined below. The series is designed to consist of six sessions. This number could be expanded should the group so desire by spending more than one week on any one lecture. The questions that are underlined may be particularly appropriate for an intermediate group, though you should not feel limited by our designations.

**Beginner Group:** For a group of people interested in a basic, introductory study of the Gospel of Mark, the DVD series alone would likely work best. You may want to make reference to and provide several copies of the written resource during the first session. However, the written material may not be accessible for everyone attending and should therefore not be required reading. A suggested structure along with discussion questions is outlined below. The series is designed to consist of six sessions. This number could be expanded should the group so desire by spending more than one week on any one lecture.

Please let us know how we can improve the accessibility of these materials so their potential is realized. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Facilitation:** Please refer to *Doing theology: DVDs for parish study – Some suggestions for facilitators*, which is included in the notebook provided each congregation in the Diocese of North Carolina, for general comments about your role as facilitator. (If a copy is not available, contact the School or visit our website, [www.episdioncschool.org](http://www.episdioncschool.org).)

**A helpful note about the academic study of the Bible:** Do not feel that you must have a PhD in order to facilitate this series! Some groups using this material may certainly engage in scholarly discussions or debates, but there is no reason for this to be the only way to use this material. Below are a few very basic insights into the academic study of the Bible. These are provided in order to keep some parts of the material from being a stumbling block for people.

- The New Testament in its current form was probably written during the first century but was not canonized (made the official scripture of the church) until the fourth century.
- The original manuscripts were written in Greek and were probably based on various written and oral traditions that had been circulating amongst the early followers of Jesus.
- Ancient manuscripts contain variations in some sections of the New Testament. For example, the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark end at verse 16:8. Other ancient

manuscripts have several different endings that follow verse 16:8, including the “Long Ending” (as it is known), which you will find in most current biblical translations as Mark 16:9-19. Scholars debate the extent to which these additional verses should be taken with the same weight as the rest of the Gospel.

- One aspect of the Bible that interests scholars is the similarity and differences among the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Scholars use these comparisons to try to answer questions about the characteristics of who wrote each Gospel, when it was written, and what other sources might have been used in its composition. Other scholars use these similarities and differences to try to determine which passages are most representative of the historical Jesus. Still other scholars use these similarities and differences to paint a complex and multilayered theological picture of Jesus.

Please also always remember, you do not have to know all the answers to questions people may ask during these sessions. Should participants ask you complex and/or academic questions beyond your knowledge base, you should feel free (and unashamed) to refer them to the list of additional resources. Even people with advanced degrees in theology (like priests!) do not always know the answer to every question about the Bible off the top of their head.

The academic study of the Bible is a very important way of learning more about the history of our tradition and the source and context of our scriptures. However, it should not close off the possibility of other ways of engaging the text. So, again, you absolutely do not have to have specialized theological training to facilitate or participate in this series in a way that deepens your faith!

### ***Suggested Format for Intermediate and Beginner Use:***

#### **Session 1: A Reckless Faith: An Introduction**

*In preparation:*

- ⇒ Make sure that you have suitable equipment to show the DVD, and that you know how to operate it! Make sure, too, that seating arrangements are conducive both for viewing and discussion.
- ⇒ Have Bibles available (and encourage people to bring their own next time).

This first session might look like this:

- *Prayer:* We encourage you to open and close all sessions with a spoken prayer and a period of silence. This prayerful period will hopefully help people transition from the busyness of their lives to a more present and reflective space. One spoken prayer you might wish to use is from the Book of Common Prayer:  
*O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray you, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 832.)

- *Introductions:* In some of our congregations, everyone will know everyone, but for many of our parishes, that may not be the case, and especially newcomers will appreciate a reminder of who folks are. Take a minute or two for basic introductions.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today. This is simply a courtesy to the group to make it clear how you'll proceed and what to expect.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire first lecture.
- *Bible Reading:* Read Mark 4:3-8 aloud.
- *Conversations:* We note some possible questions below, or you may develop your own. The underlined questions are particularly appropriate for an intermediate group, though please feel free to use any of the questions you deem appropriate regardless of your group's composition. The task is to stimulate conversation, and that requires your discerning where energy lies and drawing out insights from throughout the group. Once the conversation gets going – and we believe it will! – your task is to keep it focused, and to shift ground when a particular subject seems to have been exhausted.
  1. What does faith mean to you? Does the phrase “reckless faith” resonate with your own experience of faith? Why or why not? What are some examples from your own life in which your faith was made manifest? Did these manifestations seem “reckless”?
  2. What about the idea that the Gospel of Mark demonstrates God's “reckless faith in us”? Does this idea resonate with your own experience of who God is? Why or why not? Can you think of an experience from your own life when God seemed to be bestowing a “reckless faith” on you?
  3. Dr. Horton asserts that Jesus' identity must remain a secret from those outside his inner circle so that he can be killed at some point. The wider world would not kill Jesus if they understood who he was. And yet, the disciples seem as befuddled as anyone in the Gospel of Mark despite Jesus' attempts to explain himself to them. What do you make of the disciples' confusion, even ignorance, at times despite their intimacy with Jesus? What might the writer be trying to say about Jesus or about human beings through his treatment of the disciples?
- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read the following passages in the coming week: Mark 5, Mark 10, and Mark 9. (Or you can pick one chapter on which you intend to focus.)

One prayer you might wish to use to close this session is adapted from *Good News* by Bishop Charleston. It is as follows:

*Dear God, thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit in this conversation. We ask that the Spirit will go with us as we leave this place to be your ministers. Give us grace to be healers of what hurts us and heralds of what makes us whole. In the blessed name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

## **Session 2: He Healed Many Sick People**

*In preparation:*

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.

The second session might look like this:

- *Prayer and Silence:* See session 1 for suggestions and a possible text.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *Bible Reading:* Pick one of the following texts to read: 1) Mark 5:25-34; 2) Mark 10:46-52; or 3) Mark 9:17-31. It would make sense to use whichever text you read as the focus of your discussion.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire second lecture on Jesus' healings.
- *Conversations:*
  1. Dr. Horton explains in the DVD what first century people thought about demons. Does this information help you understand the text differently? How do you react to the language of demons? Does it make sense in your own life or is it language best left in the first century?
  2. How do you understand the healing stories? Do they have meaning for you in your own life? Why or why not?
  3. When the woman with the hemorrhage touches Jesus' robe, he senses that a power has left him and looks around to see who touched him. The text makes clear that because of the crowd numerous people would have "touched" him. But only the unnamed woman evokes the healing reaction from Jesus. If you were to describe the spiritual and emotional state of the woman before she touches Jesus, what words would you use? What strikes you as significant about this woman's faith?
  4. Dr. Horton describes the publican as someone who was willing to risk being wrong and not perfect. Does the story of the publican bring you comfort or disturb you? Why?
  5. Read the story of Blind Bartimaeus again (Mark 10:46-52). After Bartimaeus regains his sight, he follows Jesus on the way. What does this story say to you about the connection, if any, between healing (broadly construed) and discipleship? In other words, do these two experiences go hand and hand? Could one become a disciple without any kind of healing? Could one be healed in some way by Jesus without becoming a disciple? (Examples of both types exist in scripture but what about in your experience?)
- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read and meditate on Mark 2:1-12 during the week. See session 1 for a possible text for the closing prayer.

## **Session 3: Your Sins Are Forgiven**

*In preparation:*

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be. The third session might look like this:

- *Prayer and Silence:* See session 1 for suggestions and a possible text.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *Bible Reading:* Read Mark 2:1-12.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire third lecture from the DVD on Jesus' forgiveness of sins.
- *Conversations:*
  1. Were you surprised that Jesus only forgives sins once in the Gospel of Mark? How does this affect how you think about Jesus, if at all?
  2. In this story, Jesus' forgiving sins is connected with the man's healing. What do you make of this connection in the story? How do you translate this into your own life? Does it resonate with your understanding of what forgiveness does? Why or why not?
  3. Read the text again slowly. What word or phrase struck you? How does this word or phrase resonate with your own life right now?
- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read and meditate on Mark 8, 9, and 10 during the coming week. See session 1 for a possible text for the closing prayer.

#### **Session 4: Jesus' Graduate School of Discipleship**

*In preparation:*

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be. The fourth session might look like this:

- *Prayer and Silence:* See session 1 for suggestions and a possible text.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *Bible Reading:* Read one of the following sets of verses: Mark 8:31- 9:1, Mark 9:30-37 or Mark 10:32-34.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire fourth lecture on Jesus' teachings.
- *Conversations:*
  1. Why do you think Jesus was different from other teachers? What would Jesus as a teacher have been like in your opinion?

2. Have you ever had a teacher who inspired a heightened degree of loyalty and passion in his or her students? If so, what qualities did this teacher possess?
  3. In the lecture, Dr. Horton explains how easy it would have been for Jesus to escape from the garden. Can you think of a “garden” experience from your own life – a time when you knew what you had to face would be difficult, when you knew you could escape or avoid the difficulty but when you found the courage to stay and face the situation anyway? How about a “garden” experience when you escaped or ran away from some difficulty? Can you unpack the difference in outcome between facing a difficulty and running away from it?
  4. In verse 9:32, the text says that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about but were afraid to ask. This should give us comfort that we are not the first people to be confused and/or afraid! Despite their confusion and fear, the very next passage has the disciples arguing over who is best. Do you think there is a connection here between the fear and confusion on the one hand and the pride on the other hand? Can you see this connection in your own life?
- *Final summary and closing prayer:* Ask the participants to read Mark 14:43 – 15:47 during the following week. See session 1 for a possible text.

### **Session 5: The Death of Jesus**

*In preparation:*

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.

The fifth session might look like this:

- *Prayer and Silence:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *Bible reading:* Read Mark 15:21-41
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire fifth lecture on Jesus’ death.
- *Conversations:*
  1. Dr. Horton explains how the Western Church has tended to emphasize the pain and suffering of the crucifixion. Does this resonate with how you think about Jesus’ crucifixion? Does focusing on the horror of the suffering make Jesus seem more like us or more unique from us? What about if we focus on his death? Would this answer change if you lived in a different time or a different place? (For example, if you lived through the Rwandan massacres, how might you see Jesus’ suffering before his death?)
  2. The explanation provided about the veil of temple may be new to you. Did that explanation shift how you think about Jesus’ death? If so, how? If not, why not?

- *Final summary and closing prayer:* Ask the participants to read Mark 16 during the coming week. See session 1 for a possible text.

### **Session 6: The Resurrection of Jesus**

*In preparation:*

- ⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.
- ⇒ Photocopy the evaluation of this program, which is located after the guide in the notebook.

The sixth and final session might look like this:

- *Prayer and Silence:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *Bible reading:* Have someone read Mark 16. \*Note: You may want to provide a brief explanation about the end of Mark so people will better understand that part of the lecture. Here's a brief explanation: The oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark stop at verse 16:8. Some later manuscripts have additional verses after Mark 16:8, including some manuscripts which include what is known as the "Long Ending." The "Long Ending" is often found as Mark 16:9-19 in contemporary bible translations. The "Long Ending" was probably written about the same time as the Gospel of Mark (second century) but it was not included as part of the Gospel until later. Some scholars, including Dr. Horton, argue that Mark 16:9-19 should not be given the same theological weight as the ending at Mark 16:8. Therefore, when Dr. Horton talks about the ending of Mark, he is referring to Mark 16:8. Other scholars, while agreeing the longer ending was written by someone else, will nonetheless take the position that the verses are now part of the canon and therefore can also be read as theologically significant. Regardless of the position you take, you will find yourself in good company.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire sixth lecture on Jesus' resurrection.
- *Conversations:*
  1. How do you handle the ending of Mark's Gospel? Do you think historically suspect verses are less theologically significant? Why or why not? If you think Mark 16:9-19 still has theological significance, what insight do you take from the scholarly research into their origin?
  2. What do you think of Mark 16:8? Does it bring you comfort that the woman reacted this way or bother you? How do you think you would have reacted?
  3. The first people who come to Jesus' tomb are women. What significance does this have for you?
  4. Re-read Mark 16:9-19. What strikes you as significant about these verses? Pretend you are a second century scribe with the job of copying the Gospel of Mark either with or without these verses. Make a theological case either for their inclusion or exclusion.



- *Evaluation:* Encourage participants to complete the evaluation, and provide time for it. Please share the results with us.
  - *Final summary and closing prayer:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- Possible reflection questions for an advanced group:***

### **Session 1: *A Reckless Faith: An Introduction***

1. “Who do you say that I am?” There are many assumptions about learning and faith embedded in this question. Spend some time unpacking this question in light of your own experience of faith and ministry.
2. Is a “reckless faith” compatible with parish ministry? Why or why not?
3. Use Mark 1:20 as a text for a group *lectio divina* exercise. What is God saying to you right now about your own discipleship?

### **Session 2: *He Healed Many Sick People***

1. The language of demons is found not only throughout the scriptures but also in much of the mystical literature of the church. (For example, the desert fathers write about being assaulted by demons.) In what way might this language still be able to be used in the contemporary church? How do you balance (and understand the balance between) this type of language and the essential insights of modern medicine and psychology?
2. How do you handle the healing stories in the context of someone in your parish with some type of physical ailment? How do you translate a “reckless faith” into that pastoral situation?
3. What experiences in your own life come to mind when you hear these healing stories?

### **Session 3: *Your Sins are Forgiven***

1. Dr. Horton outlines the Jewish tradition of separating the sins against God and sins against neighbor. Are remnants of this separation still present in our liturgical tradition? Would you want to revive (or strengthen) the sense that some sins against our neighbors require concrete action if we are to atone of them? Would this be theologically problematic? Why or why not?

### **Session 4: *Jesus’ Graduate School of Discipleship***

1. In the lecture, Dr. Horton explains how easy it would have been for Jesus to escape from the garden. Can you think of a “garden” experience from your own life – a time when you knew what you had to face would be difficult, when you knew you could escape or avoid the difficulty but when you found the courage to stay and face the situation anyway? How about a “garden” experience when you did escape or run away from some difficulty? Can you unpack the difference in outcome between facing a difficulty and running away from it?
2. If you save your life, you will lose it. Can you think of an example from your own life when this paradox was true? How about when it was false?

### **Session 5: *The Death of Jesus***

1. If you were preparing a sermon on Jesus' death, what would strike you as significant right now? Has this changed over time?
2. The image of the "suffering servant" has a significant role sometimes in how we think about parish ministry. Dr. Horton's insight about the Western Church's emphasis on suffering compared with Mark's emphasis on Jesus' death seems interesting in that light. What connections do you see? How does the role of the priest shift if the emphasis is different?

### **Session 6: *The Resurrection of Jesus***

1. Re-read Mark 16:9-19. Make a *theological* case either for their inclusion or exclusion in the canon.
2. What ending of Mark do you think is most powerful? Which ending would you rather preach on? Why?

#### ***Additional Resources on the Gospel of Mark:***

Donahue, John R. *The Gospel of Mark*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002.

Heil, John Paul. *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.

Keenan, John P. *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Discipleship Queries for First World Christians*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994. (Note: These two books would be particularly appropriate for anyone with a passion for social justice issues.)

Purnell, Puck. *Through Mark's Eyes: A Portrait of Jesus Based on the Gospel of Mark*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

Wright, Tom. *Mark for Everyone*. SPCK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

We are able to update our facilitators' guides on-line, so if you find books that you believe deserve mention here, please contact us.

