

main course

encounters in Mark's Gospel – sixteen

A shared out-loud reading of the whole Gospel

This is the last of a number of '**encounters in Mark's Gospel**'. All the others were designed to enable a small-group conversation around a particular story in Mark's Gospel. This final session invites you and your group to share in hearing the whole of Mark's Gospel read out loud so that you can experience **Mark's big story** in something like the way he probably intended it to be heard:

- Most of Mark's intended audience would have been unable to read a text for themselves, so we can presume that they would experience it together in **oral performance**, rather than silently reading the text on their own.
- As all the individual little stories in the Gospel (like the fifteen stories offered in the other 'encounters in Mark's Gospel' materials) were already in use in the churches, Mark's intention in writing a 'Gospel' must surely have been to enable everyone to hear the whole of the 'big story' – and that means **hearing it all at one time**, right the way through from beginning to end.

Although it may be something you've never considered doing before, it is not as strange or boring as most people seem to suspect that it will be. Indeed, it works a bit like a movie – it has the same pace and excitement as a good movie, it uses lots of sudden changes of scene to build its big story from lots of little stories and at just under two hours it's about the same length as many movies. It even has something of a surprise ending...

ARRANGING FOR AN OUT-LOUD READING OF THE WHOLE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

This final **encounter in Mark's Gospel** is quite distinct in form from all the rest. You will need to be sure you have a clear two hours for the meeting (*this should allow time for a wriggle and comfort break in the middle*). You will need to arrange who will read which sections of the text. You may have to change your normal venue, if using a loop or easier acoustics would be an issue for anyone in your group. You will have to decide where your reading will finish, as where Mark's Gospel ends is not entirely clear in some English translations. Notes on all these matters, and others, are given below:

Recruiting readers - It is probably easiest to change reader every chapter, with up to sixteen different readers. Encourage each reader to be ready to start as soon as the reader of the previous chapter stops, to keep the momentum going. Say you have only four readers, it might be best to keep to everyone reading a chapter at a time - the frequent change of voice should help everyone's concentration.

Timing - It should be possible to do this within two hours, even with a break in the middle.

Taking a break - It's important that the listeners are comfortable and are able to hear each reader or the whole event will become very tedious for them. An unbroken reading might feel a bit long for a 21st Century British audience, so a break (*for moving about, talking, toilet visits and possibly some sort of snack and refreshments*) is a very good idea. Allowing

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the reader of Chapter Eight to continue to verse one of Chapter Nine, then stopping for a break seems to work well. The reader of Chapter Nine then starts after the break from verse two. Incidentally, most people find this second half of the Gospel feels more pacy and engaging than the first.

Where to stop - At the end, it is important to finish with the word 'afraid' in verse 8 of Chapter 16. Most English translations indicate in some way that the alternative endings that follow are not in the earliest manuscripts. So, do try to stop with the women running away from the tomb in silence and afraid (16:8). It might be best to suggest to everyone that there will be a period of silence immediately after the Gospel ends, before the group is invited to share comments on how the complete-reading has affected them. Then close with prayer (and possibly a song – one possible song is provided with these notes).

Where to meet - It's important that the group are comfortable (*but not so comfortable they're all asleep by chapter three or four!*), but it's also important that they can HEAR, so consider whether it is worth meeting somewhere there is a hearing loop system if there is any likelihood that one or more hearing aid users will be part of the group.

What To Do When It Happens...

1. ASSEMBLING and BEGINNING

The group needs to gather, settle in and prepare for listening to the whole story together. This may or may not include prayer or worship or some catering option, depending on your local circumstances and context. You all need to check that everyone, especially each of the readers, is clear about the practicalities of what is going to happen.

2. SHARING THE STORY

The group then share in listening to the whole of Mark's Gospel, possibly with a comfort break after Chapter Eight, probably with a little pause for silence at the end.

3. OUR INITIAL REACTIONS

The group could then consider the question:

- "What did we make of that?"

4. HOW DOES THAT HELP US TO LIVE NOW?

Working as a group, you might find it worthwhile to try answering two more questions:

- In what ways does Mark's big story speak to us today?
- What are we going to do differently now?

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5. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG *(optional)*

SHARING RESURRECTION *based on Mark 16:1-8*

tune: Down Ampney, Rejoice and Sing no.294

1.

Fear, failure and dismay
looked set to claim the day,
yet hope itself
here shouldered out dejection;
this empty, undone tomb
somehow became the womb
that birthed a people
sharing resurrection.

2.

Back, then, in Galilee,
Jesus was found to be
alive in ev'ry
fear-defying action;
each time believers shared,
stood up and showed they cared,
the living Jesus
shared his resurrection.

3.

Still, when a grey despair
hangs heavy in the air
and justice feels a
cruel, dreamed distraction,
what started at that tomb
can still make living room
for hope and healing,
working resurrection.

4.

Called to engage and share
with people ev'rywhere,
and birth communities
of love in action,
may we delight to see
new hope midwifery
and spend ourselves in
sharing resurrection.

John M. Campbell

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

This is one of a number of **encounters in Mark's Gospel** that are being offered through the Vision4Life website. Between them these conversation materials explore a whole range of different encounters that Jesus has in the course of the Gospel story. If your group found this one helpful they may wish to try some of the others.

*Full acknowledgement for the ideas and information that have helped us to construct these materials is given in the **Introduction to the 'encounters in Mark's Gospel'** programme on the Vision4Life website.*

www.vision4life.org.uk