

main course

encounters in Mark's Gospel – two

Jesus and the fishermen – Mk 1.16-20

This is one of a number of '**encounters in Mark's Gospel**' each of which enables a small-group conversation around a particular story in Mark's Gospel. These conversations aim to help you, and everyone else in your group, to:

- build up your **confidence** in actively exploring bits of the Bible
- **make connections** between the biblical story and your own life story
- find fresh **vision** for the business of being human today

all from watching and talking freely with each other about encounters between Jesus and those he meets – as we find them recorded in Mark's Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

This second **encounter in Mark's Gospel** shows Jesus starting to find some followers. Many of us probably remember this story, even if we can't pinpoint where we first heard it. It's a very simple story, but it still repays careful consideration. It comes laden with a challenge that echoes down the centuries. Watch and listen well.

STRUCTURE

Each of your **encounters in Mark's Gospel** will follow the same basic structure:

1. Assembling and beginning
2. Sharing the story of the encounter
3. Our initial reactions - sharing our own first responses
4. Extra Insights 1 – learning from Mark's big story
5. Extra Insights 2 – learning about Jesus' world
6. Exploring the Encounter Triangle
 - What do we think was learned from encountering Jesus?
 - What do we think Jesus learned from the encounter?
 - What have we learned from watching the encounter?
7. Deciding how that helps us to live now
8. (*optional*) Rounding it off with a song

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1. ASSEMBLING and BEGINNING

The group needs to gather, settle in and prepare for a shared conversation. This may or may not include prayer or worship or some catering option, depending on your local circumstances and context.

2. SHARING THE STORY

The conversation is started by hearing or sharing the story that will form its focus – the story told in **Mark 1.16-20**. This might be done in one of the following ways:

- Someone reads **Mark 1.16-20** straight from their Bible
- The group re-constructs the story of **Mk 1.16-20** from various rememberings
- The story of **Mk 1.16-20** is told by someone who has prepared it for telling
- A locally-devised combination of some of the above

Mark 1.16-20 is one of those stories that is present in Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel as well as in Mark, with another rather different story of how these disciples were called given in John's Gospel, so if your group uses a remembering and re-telling approach you are going to have to decide how closely you all want to keep to Mark's particular telling.

3. OUR INITIAL REACTIONS

The group should then consider the question:

- **"What is this story about?"**

This can be done with a brief time of discussion in twos and threes followed by reporting to the whole group, or done as a whole group conversation – as group size and local practice allow. Let's be clear, there's no 'right' answer to this question – it's simply an assembling of ways in which hearing the story has struck group members and their memories of how they have learned its 'meaning' from past encounters and received teaching.

4. EXTRA INSIGHTS part one – learning from Mark's big story

Share the information about how Mark has used this story and where he's placed it in his big story that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 6** at the end of these notes

5. EXTRA INSIGHTS part two – learning about Jesus' world

Share the information about the social, political and religious world in which Jesus lived that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 7** at the end of these notes

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6. EXPLORING THE ENCOUNTER TRIANGLE

The group takes time to explore the story (in the light of their initial ideas and the Extra Insights that they've shared). Some group members may recall a story which they may take to be an account of a *prior* encounter between Peter and Andrew and Jesus. In that story, found in John 1.35-42, Peter and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist. It is sometimes used to account for the readiness of Peter and Andrew to follow Jesus in our story. However, Mark does not offer us any indication of any prior meeting. As a group, you should try to consider the story JUST as Mark records it, without adding in such 'helpful' bits from other Gospels. See how that effects how the story reads:

Standing and looking at the story from the perspective of those fishermen, consider:

- **What do we think the fishermen learned from encountering Jesus?**
 - *teasing this out ... What were the likely concerns of these fishermen before this meeting? What happened here? Why did they respond as they did?*

Standing and looking at the story from Jesus' perspective, consider:

- **What do we think Jesus learned from this encounter?**
 - *teasing this out ... What do we think Jesus may have brought to this meeting – particularly, what made him so persuasive? What did Jesus receive through this encounter? What did this meeting do to Jesus?*

Standing where we stand, watching the whole encounter, consider:

- **What have we learned from watching this encounter?**
 - *teasing this out ... What previous understandings of this story did we bring? What have we found there this time? What about this story connects with our own stories? What do we take away from watching this encounter together?*

7. HOW DOES THAT HELP US TO LIVE NOW?

Now your group needs to bring it all home. Working as a group, consider two questions:

- **In what ways does this story speak to us today?**

Be imaginative. Be playful. Be daring. Be incredibly serious. Try ideas. Disagree. Come to a consensus. Work with the story like you're squeezing oranges. What good ideas to help us with living now can your group find from what you have watched?

- **What are we going to do differently now?**

Be practical. Be realistic. But be prepared to face the risks and challenges the story raises. Honestly address what the story seems to be saying to you and your situation as individuals, but also as a group, in your church and in your local community.

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8. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG (optional)

PETER'S SONG – following Peter thro' Mark's Gospel

tune: Carey's (Surrey), Rejoice and Sing no.198

1.

One glance, few words, and I was gone;
I left my nets and followed on.
For people, now, I'd fish (he said) -
his hope and promise filled my head.
*Yet, Jesus, then I barely knew
the price I'd pay to follow you!*

2.

His touch, no words, and she was healed;
her fever gone, our friendship sealed.
Then town by town throughout the land
I saw folk healed by his command.
*Still, Jesus, then I did not know
the way you'd take, or where we'd go.*

3.

His question, frank, was "Who am I?"
"You are the Christ!" my bold reply;
but next he told of death and pain
and I was angry, once again.
*Good Jesus, then I could not see,
the way that things just had to be.*

4.

A loaf, a cup, an upper room,
more words from him about our doom.
"I'll never let you down", I said,
as pride and bragging filled my head.
*Dear Jesus, then I would not see
the worthlessness you'd find in me.*

5.

One glance, no words, a cock'rel's cry,
I knew there was none worse than I!
For I'd betrayed my only Lord,
despite my sworn and promised word.
*Brave Jesus, then alone you died -
my failure killed you - how I cried!*

6.

Three days and then an empty tomb -
new hope began to pierce my gloom;
his message called for me, by name,
with Jesus, Peter lives again!
*So, Jesus, now, at last, I see
you had to die to set me free*

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

see the following two pages for the "Extra Insights" materials for this conversation...

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part one – learning from Mark's big story

What can we learn from the stories Mark places both before and after our story and from the way our story works in the whole- Gospel storyline?:

The bit before our bit (Mk 1.14-15)

- **A prophet for the people** – Our story gives no indication of any prior meeting between these fishermen and Jesus. However, this earlier passage tells us that Jesus has already begun a public prophetic ministry. So, even though they'd never met, Mark allows that these four fishermen may have had heard something of what Jesus was about – however garbled and incomplete their information might have been.

The bit after our bit (Mk 1.21-39)

- **But we're still at home here** – the shocking abruptness of the net-leaving in our story is slightly adjusted by this next story. We get a clearer statement about Jesus' evident 'authority' (v.27), but we are still in the fishermen's home town and after teaching and healing at the sabbath assembly, Jesus even visits Simon and Andrew's home (v.29). Indeed, after healing Simon's mother-in-law, Jesus brings enormous local kudos and fame to this household by engaging in a flurry of healing and deliverance right at the entrance to their house. Then, and only then, do Jesus and his new team head off for a shared mission to other towns and villages in Galilee, leaving fish-fishing behind. We are never told how the rest of Simon's household survives now that the family business has been so abruptly abandoned.

Our story in the flow of Mark's whole-Gospel story

- **A brave beginning on an unknown road** – These four – Simon (soon renamed Peter), Andrew, James and John - are to be the four followers of Jesus of whom we hear the most in Mark's Gospel. We will hear more of their voices, their insights, their catastrophic misunderstandings and their aching failures than those of any other followers of Jesus. As the big story unfolds we all seem to be invited to identify with them as they try (with variable success) to understand and follow Jesus. But it all starts here, with this shocking, brave, high-risk moment of abandoning everything that practical good sense would allow, to set out with an unknown Jesus.

Are there any experiences or moments in our own faith journeys or personal experience that connect in any way with this stark story of leaving and following?

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part two – learning about Jesus' world

You and your family

Freedom to roam, 21st Century style - Nowadays for young people in the UK saving up and setting off for a 'gap year' wandering the world, keeping in touch with family and friends by e-mailing from crowded cafes in exotic locations, is nothing special. World recession might make a big dent in that bit of our culture, but the freedom to roam is widely acknowledged and families may actively encourage it.

Family obligations, 1st Century style - In Jesus' Galilee there was no health service, no dole, no state education programmes and the only safety net most people could imagine would be the support of their own extended family. Families survived together or failed together. If you were a breadwinner of some kind, to walk out and abandon your trade or your craft would be an unimaginable betrayal of family - a social disgrace.

You and survival

Wealth and protections, 21st Century style – OK, so 21st Century UK life is far from perfect, but many of us can remember times when life was harder and even those of us who will never receive a City financier's bonus or be able to afford a flash car are at least likely to have access to warm, secure housing with enough income to get by. And round it all there is a vast network of legal protections to try to save all of us from food poisoning, exploitation, violence, etc., etc... (even tho' it is still far from perfect).

Poverty and oppression, 1st Century style – For most of the population in Jesus' world, surviving in a client kingdom in a far-off forgotten corner of the Roman Empire took a vast amount of determination - and still it was endlessly threatened by enormous, uncontrollable risks. The ruling authorities were arbitrary and exploitative and regularly resorted to ugly violence. The courts consistently gave rulings in favour of the wealthy. Landowners presumed a right to oppress tenant and peasant farmers with debt and land theft. And fishing is most unlikely to have been any sort of exception. In all probability there was a taxation regime that took a high proportion of the profits in return for permission to fish. Even the Zebedees' 'hired workers' may not have been hired by them but put to work with them by the tax controller. Survival meant holding on to what you'd got, even though it didn't make you much at all. Leave your nets? Are you crazy?

See what this information about Jesus' world does to our understanding of Mk 1.16-20...