

# main course

## encounters in Mark's Gospel – four

### *Jesus and his family – Mk 3.19-21 & 31-35*

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 fourth **encounter in Mark's Gospel** tells of Jesus, his mother and his brothers. In its own way it might be one of the most shocking and revolutionary stories in the whole Gospel. See what you can see as together you watch this encounter between Jesus and his family. Be sure to watch it closely.

#### 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 3.19-21 & 31-35**. This might be done in one of the following ways:

- Someone reads **Mark 3.19-21 & 31-35** straight from their Bible
- The group re-constructs this story from Mark 3 from various rememberings
- This story from Mark 3 is told by someone who has prepared it for telling
- A locally-devised combination of some of the above

**Mark 3.19-21 & 31-35** is one of those stories that is present in Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel as well as in Mark, 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 & 7** 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 8** 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), standing, in turn, at each corner of the triangle:

Standing and looking at the story from the perspective of Mary & the family, consider:

- **What do we think Mary learned from this attempted meeting with Jesus?**
  - *teasing this out ... What were the concerns and social assumptions that led to this family intervention? What happened? How would the family have understood Jesus' actions and words? What do you think they thought, felt and said as they spent a whole day climbing the hill road back to Nazareth?*

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

- **What do we think Jesus learned from this attempted family visit?**
  - *teasing this out ... What were Jesus' concerns before he heard of his mother's visit? What was Jesus telling himself, his family and the crowd? What is Jesus doing to the idea of 'family'? What, if anything, might explain Jesus' response to this family visit? Where did all this leave Jesus?*

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

- **What have we learned from watching these proceedings?**
  - *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 the 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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#### 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](http://www.vision4life.org.uk)

*see the following three 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 3.13-19)

- **A new set of brothers?** – as his ministry progresses, Jesus appoints twelve followers 'to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message'. Is this some sort of new or alternative mission family? There are twelve of them – one to represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel that traced their ancestry back to the twelve sons of Jacob – so they seem to symbolise 'all Israel' or even a 'new Israel'. Remember that by the time of Jesus most of these twelve tribes had not existed in an identifiable way for several hundred years, ever since the northern tribes were dispersed by the Assyrians after the fall of Samaria c. 722 BCE.

#### The bit in the middle of our bit (Mk 3.22-30)

- **Family belonging and family division in the spirit world** – In resisting the accusation of the scribes from Jerusalem that his powers to cast out demons come from Beelzebul the prince of demons, Jesus talks in terms of households and loyalty and division. Does any of this resonate with the issues of belonging and loyalty and division within human families, including Jesus' own family?

#### The bit after our bit (Mk 4.1-9)

- **Stories for sharing** – this following section plunges into the business of Jesus' teaching in parables. Could this be seen as family conversation within the 'new' family? Jesus concludes, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen' – an open invitation to engagement that resonates with Jesus' definition of family in our story as 'whoever does the will of God'.

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

*see the following page....*

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## EXTRA INSIGHTS

### part one – learning from Mark's big story – contd.

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

- **Jesus challenging everyone's expectations** – our story is by no means the only story where Jesus shocks or startles by overturning everyone's social and religious expectations. He does this all through the big story, not just when he is confronting the authorities in Jerusalem. In his Galilean ministry and on the road we can watch Jesus relentlessly challenging 'what everyone knows' about a wide range of social and religious issues. He challenges all the following expectations and assumptions that his own society took for granted:
  - *That survival is your first priority (Mk 1.16-20)*
  - *That some people are clean and others unclean (1.40-45)*
  - *That no-one on earth can forgive sins (Mk 2.10)*
  - *That there are people you must not eat with (Mk 2.16-17)*
  - *That religious regulations take priority over kindness (Mk 2.27)*
  - *That the scribes are the only interpreters of God's law (Mk 3.4-6)*
  - *That family is family and everyone else is different (our passage)*
  - *That human existence will always be dominated by evil spirits (Mk 5.1-13)*
  - *That some people are much more important than others (Mk 5.21-45)*
  - *That you have to show special loyalty to your home town (Mk 6.1-6)*
  - *That the inherited traditions of the elders must be followed (Mk 7.1-20)*
  - *That there is a God-given priority for the people of Israel (Mk 7.24-30)*
  - *That God's anointed one (the Messiah) will easily triumph (Mk 8.27-33)*
  - *That wealth and prosperity are signs of God's blessing (Mk 10.17-31)*

Can we make anything of that?

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## EXTRA INSIGHTS

### part two – learning about Jesus' world

#### 1. Family is everything

Malina and Rohrbaugh<sup>1</sup> put it like this:

*'In the Mediterranean world of antiquity the extended family meant everything. It was not only the source of one's status in the community, but also functioned as the primary economic, religious, educational, and social network. Loss of connection to the family meant the loss of these vital networks as well as any connection to the land. Loss of family was the most serious loss one could sustain.'*

As was noted in the 'Extra Insights' for encounter no.2, there were no alternative 'safety nets' for survival in ancient societies when things went wrong. Unless you learned how to survive by begging, the only place you could reasonably go for support in rural Galilee was your own family. Family is everything.

What, then, would be the expected response when you were told that your mother and brothers were outside your door?

#### 2. Signalling respect

In ancient societies honour and shame – that is your **family's** honour and shame – were very, very important. Your family's status determined your status. If anyone publically dishonoured your family, you had a duty to challenge and dispute their disrespect.

For Jesus to fail so publically to meet and greet his mother and brothers when they had made the whole-day journey down from Nazareth to meet with him – simply allowing others to pass on a message that seemed to openly repudiate them – must have been a shocking social outrage. No wonder Malina and Rohrbaugh conclude that our story, from a Mediterranean cultural perspective, *'is one of the most radical things in the Gospels.'*<sup>2</sup>

So, what might Jesus be signalling to his family, to the crowds around his house and to his followers, then and now?

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<sup>1</sup> Malina, Bruce J. and Rohrbaugh, Richard L. (2003) *Social Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, page 414.

<sup>2</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, page 159.