

main course

encounters in Mark's Gospel – eight

Jesus and the clever disciple – Mk 8.27-38

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 eighth **encounter in Mark's Gospel** finds us at the hinge point of the Gospel story – everything changes here. Peter, who is part of the story from beginning to end, has a moment centre-stage – a dialogue with Jesus. Will he impress? What will he learn? What will we see as we watch it happen?

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 8.27-38**. This might be done in one of the following ways:

- Someone reads **Mark 8.27-38** straight from their Bible
- The group re-constructs the story of **Mark 8.27-38** from various rememberings
- The story of **Mark 8.27-38** is told by someone who has prepared it for telling
- A locally-devised combination of some of the above

Mark 8.27-38 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 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 Peter, consider:

- **What do we think Peter learned from this encounter with Jesus?**
 - *teasing this out ... Where did Peter get his answer? What caused Peter to suddenly react so badly to Jesus? What did Peter learn about what he knew and what he didn't know?*

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

- **What do we think Jesus learned from this encounter with Peter?**
 - *teasing this out ... Why do we think Jesus asked these questions? What did he make of Peter's reply? What is so different about what Jesus now risks saying to his followers? Where does Jesus get that "must" in v.31 from? What might Jesus learn from Peter's reaction?*

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 in the story 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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8. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG (optional) - the first of two possible songs

NAMING and HEARING STORIES based on Mark 8.27-38

tune: Theodoric, Rejoice and Sing no. 274

1. Peter spoke, proud and true -
did the best he could do -
told them all what he knew:
 "This is God's anointed,
 heavenly appointed!"
Gave a name, name, name,
to explain, plain, plain.
Would his call say it all,
need no further story?
2. Jesus then made it clear
how much more we must hear
if we'd let him come near -
 we must learn his story,
 cross and death and glory;
feel his pain, pain, pain,
then his reign, reign, reign.
If we'd see who he'd be
we must learn his story!
3. Others met on life's road,
watched and feared or ignored,
quickly named and deplored
 often classed as 'other',
 rarely sister, brother.
Must we name, name, name,
just to shame, shame, shame;
pigeon hole ev'ry soul,
never learn their story?
4. Jesu's life ev'ry day
touched the lives on his way,
let them all have their say -
 outcasts with their dangers,
 foreigners and strangers -
let them share, share, share,
from their care, care, care,
till he knew what to do,
learning from their stories.
5. Still today, we may meet,
name and leave incomplete
or, like Jesus, may greet,
 listening to others,
 finding sisters, brothers.
Help us know, know, know
how to grow, grow, grow
as we face and embrace;
merging all our stories.

*John M. Campbell,
with help from David Peel and others
at the St. Cuthbert's Centre on Holy Island,
March 2009*

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8. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG (optional) - the second of two possible songs

THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER based on Mark 8.27-38 tune: Ode to joy (Beethoven)

1. Boldly, bravely Peter answered
 Jesu's question "Who am I?".
"You're the Christ, God's chosen victor!"
 seemed the only right reply -
having seen a thousand healings,
 cures to conquer each distress,
Peter looked for certain triumph,
 as the friend of this success.
2. Calmly, quietly, Jesus countered,
 speaking of the Son of Man;
for us, he must be rejected,
 if he would fulfil God's plan.
Only by this dying, rising,
 could he rescue and release;
liberate those trapped in failure;
 bring new life and joy and peace.
3. Puzzled, angry, Peter blustered,
 "Lord, this simply cannot be!
Hope is growing; hearts are lifting -
 you can win now, easily!"
Jesus, sadly, firmly, frankly,
 put aside this man-made thought;
for us, took the way of suff'ring,
 set his own success at nought.
4. Here we glimpse the Gospel's
 grandeur,
here we touch its healing pow'r:
 Jesus, driven by compassion,
 goes to face his darkest hour.
Now he heads for stark betrayal,
now he knows that he must die -
 spends himself to pay our ransom,
 gives his life for you and I.
5. If we follow such a saviour,
 we must also bear our cross;
live with sacrificial friendship -
 gaining by embracing loss -
live as carers, not consumers,
 daily giving all we can;
find our freedom in obedience
 to this awesome Son of Man.

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 8.22-26)

- **Seeing in stages** – as you will have discovered if your group has talked about no.7 in this series, the story before this is about Jesus restoring sight to a blind man – but healing him in two distinct stages (first time he can sort of see people, but '*they look like trees walking*'; second time he sees clearly). It seems quite likely that Mark has deliberately placed this story before ours to highlight the way that Peter has begun to see who Jesus is, but still has a **lot** more to see and accept before he will fully and truly see who Jesus is.

The bit after our bit (Mk 9.1-8)

- **An encounter on a mountain** - Immediately after Jesus deliberately and publicly stood alongside all of us (by asking John to baptise him in the Jordan), a voice from heaven confirmed that he was God's son and that God was pleased with him. Now, immediately after Jesus accepts Peter's declaration that he is God's Messiah (anointed one) and goes on to say that that must mean he will be rejected, suffer and die (clearly not what Peter expected), we also have a voice from heaven confirming that this is God's Son and that God is pleased with him. Only this time we have Moses and Elijah (possibly representing the Law and the prophets) signalling their acceptance too. Perhaps this is a means of offering clear and necessary confirmation that the unravelling of Jesus' ministry that will follow as he heads towards Jerusalem is not a terrible mistake but a central part of God's purpose for Jesus, and for us all.

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

- **The hinge point of the whole story** - Before this, Jesus ministers (to great effect) all across Galilee, offering comfort to oppressed people, winning more and more friends and followers; most of his opposition up until now has been from demons. After this, he heads on towards Jerusalem and Golgotha, offering stark challenges to the religious and civil authorities, dramatically losing public support and stirring up intense opposition from the client group who run the temple and keep the Romans happy. This discussion on the road about who Jesus is, and what that means he "must" do is the hinge conversation of the whole Gospel.

Can we make anything of that?

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part two – learning about Jesus' world

This is a story about an encounter between Jesus and the 'in' group that has begun to act as his alternative family – the group that gives him his status and acceptance and support. Earlier (Mark 3.31-35), he had very publically and shockingly pushed aside his actual Nazareth family of mother, brothers and sisters and accepted instead this other family of followers as the key social group that affirmed his identity and honour. Now, it would seem, although they are not pushed aside but still encouraged to follow, Jesus declares their shared understanding of 'what must be' to be dangerously wrong. Peter (possibly acting as a sort of spokesperson for them all) cannot accept what Jesus says and is openly resisted and shamed. This leaves an aching dissonance between what Jesus sees himself to be about and what his followers are still hoping will happen. It will persist all the way to the end of the Gospel, as Mark tells it, with only a final hint that these faithful followers will finally understand and accept what Jesus is about.

Now, it is God alone (echoed only by the visions of Moses and Elijah on the mountain) – and not a single one of Jesus' followers on the road – who gives Jesus his status, purpose, acceptance and honour. Even his inner circle of friends, his surrogate family, is significantly out of joint.

This reads like a recipe for disaster – from this point on, the inner circle of the Galilean Jesus movement and Jesus himself remain deeply divided about what needs to happen. Yet, at Jesus' bidding, they still head off together to take on the authorities in Jerusalem. As we shall see, the predictable disaster happens. But, as Mark tells it, this disaster was both necessary and effective in a way that nothing else could have been – that is where the Gospel lies – although Mark's Jesus only gives us one tiny hint (Mark 10.45) as to **why** things have to be this way.