

Mark Commentary: Part Two

Healings and the Healer

a commentary on the first thirteen chapters of the Gospel of Mark

One of my aims in Part Two will be to show how Mark's narrative is a double story: (1) a journey of spirit awakening taking place in the lives of the disciples and (2) what a spirit-awake human looks like in action—that is, how Jesus' presence, words, and actions are dramatizing the qualities of the resurrected human and how that presence among us is healing to others.

This double journey is going on (or might go on) in the lives of all of us. (1) we, like the disciples, journey toward full enlightenment (death-and-resurrection living), and (2) we, like Jesus, resolve to live our resurrection life (spirit enlightenment or profound humanness) in the real world, in the historical challenges of our time and place. Like Jesus, we as resurrected women and men expend our new life of profound humanness for the healing and well-being of others.

In the first 13 verses of chapter one, Mark's character "Jesus" has his own death and resurrection experience—in the same sense that you or I might have our own death and resurrection experience—in the living now of our own conscious lives. It is important to notice that Mark retains this complete humanness of Jesus by having him in these early verses undergo John's baptism of spirit washing and Jesus' own calling to spirit mission, a calling that any of us might also experience.

Secondly, it is important for us to notice that in the rest of Mark's narrative Mark's character "Jesus" is already an exemplar of "resurrected" humanity. After these first 13 verses, Mark's Jesus is on a different journey than the disciples. The disciples are on a spirit journey toward resurrection. Jesus depicts the journey of the resurrected human in action. He is what a human being looks like who has been resurrected to his profound humanness, on the other side of having died to his primal devotion to temporal relations. Mark's Jesus-story is about the journey unto death of a human being after his entry into the resurrection life.

Mark is picturing two parallel journeys : (1) toward profound humanness and (2) being an enactment of profound humanness. Neither of these two journeys is ever completed in your lifetime or mine. We can be journeying toward profound humanness our whole life long. And to whatever extent we access our profound humanness, we are also be on the second journey of giving that profound humanness some historical manifestation.

In Luke's second book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, we see more about what this second journey of resurrected humans looks like as the story of real-world historical living by persons other than Jesus. Peter, Paul and other men and women are presented by Luke as further "resurrection" exemplars. Luke wants us to get it that we who live "in Christ" are living the resurrection life. Indeed, we are the resurrection of Jesus.

In Mark's narrative, the disciples are attracted to Jesus' humanity, but they do not understand "Who he is" until after his crucifixion, and their vision of his resurrection. The disciples are on a journey toward resurrection. Meanwhile, they are quite dumb about what that means. Resurrection is a secret that the disciples are still learning.

It is probably easier for most of us to identify with the disciples who are moving toward resurrection step-by-step through the course of Mark's story. We can also identify with the crowds who are intrigued, but puzzled, by Jesus' parables. We can even identify with those persons who reject Jesus.

Mark's Jesus uses parables to trick the sleeping into noticing their sleepiness and seeking more truth. Then to his more committed disciples, Mark's Jesus explains his parables further, expecting them to catch on to their own profound humanness sooner than the crowds.

Mark is assuming that the readers of his Gospel will be carried along, like the disciples, toward the total unraveling of their egoism to an embodiment of the resurrected life that was walking and talking among them in the body of Jesus and later in the body of the church, that came to be referred to as "the body of Christ"—that is, the body of the resurrected one. So in Mark's narrative, we are entitled to identify with Jesus ministering to his blind followers and well as identifying with the blind followers to whom Jesus is ministering.

As we read this section of the Mark's gospel, let keep in mind the originality and imagination of this remarkable person we are calling "Mark." We are dialoguing with Mark, not with Jesus. Jesus is a character in Mark's story. We can deduce things about the historical Jesus from Mark's creation, but the historical Jesus will not be our focus in reading and commenting on the Gospel of Mark. We are in a conversation with Mark in the same way that reading a Harry Potter novel is a conversation with J. K. Rowling, rather than Harry Potter. Of course we can have a conversation with Harry Potter as one of Rowling's characters, and so also we can have a conversation with Jesus as one of Mark's characters.

Chapter One

Mark: 1: 1-3 Good News

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begins with the fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah:

Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

In his very first sentence, Mark is telling us what his piece of writing is going to be about. It is good news (gospel). And this good news is about the advent of the Messiah, the “Son of God.” Mark does not tell us yet what that language means. In fact it is a secret that Mark keeps until chapter 16. Mark’s first hint about what “Christ” and “Son of God” mean is that we are about to see an important historical happening, an advent that is a big deal for the whole of humanity. Mark has found a passage from Isaiah that gives us an initial hint about what Mark’s “good news” is about..

Mark is using this history-bending passage from Isaiah to allude to Mark’s own history-bending “good news”. “Prepare the way of the Lord!” Christians today may jump to the conclusion that by “the Lord,” Mark means Jesus, but actually “the Lord” in this passage is talking about the Creator of heaven and earth—the Invisible All Powerful Mystery that is operative in every event that happens to us. This Final Ever-present “Lord’s way” is being freshly prepared for our direct experience. We don’t yet have Mark’s clarity on what this means, but we do have Mark’s announcement that he will be discussing a happening of major import, certainly not a trivial topic. The Lord of all history is going to make some sort of special impression on all of us who are willing to have our eyes see and our ears hear.

Mark: 1: 4-8 John, the Baptist

For John came and began to baptize men in the desert, proclaiming baptism as the mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins. All the people of the Judaea countryside and everyone in Jerusalem went out to him in the desert and received his baptism in the river Jordan, publicly confessing their sins.

John himself was dressed in camel-hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. The burden of his preaching was, “There is someone coming after me who is stronger than I —indeed I am not good enough to kneel down and undo his shoes. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In these verses, Mark is indicating that the religious movement initiated by John, the Baptist is an important precursor to the topic of Mark’s good news. Mark implies that Jesus identified deeply with the movement initiated by John, the Baptist. Many New Testament scholars believe that this was true of the historical Jesus—that the man Jesus

was not a Zealot or a Sadducee or a Pharisee or an Essene—that Jesus chose the radical movement of John the Baptist instead of these other options for communal association. Decades later, Mark still felt that John’s movement was an important movement, as well as an important part of the story of Jesus. Mark does not give us any details of that movement or of Jesus’ biography in relation to it. But Mark did feel the need to clarify something about John’s movement.

Mark clearly felt that the movement Jesus initiated needed to be distinguished from John’s movement—that the addition that Jesus made to John’s movement was huge. John was a wild-hermit, eating and dressing like the ascetic Elijah, and calling people out to the edge of society to be washed of the evil that inflicted that entire wicked era of history. Individual people were volunteering for that washing, and John’s movement was also an address to the whole society and a critic of that whole society’s departure from the Mosaic norm, indeed from the deep norm of being human. Jesus apparently concurred with that radical critique. Indeed, Jesus accepted John’s warning that a radical historical judgement from Eternity of the entire human world was on the way, and would arrive soon.

Perhaps, we can also identify with John’s message, as we look realistically at our 21st century world order—refusing to deal fully with our ecological challenges, drifting backward toward authoritarian governments, racism, sexism, bigotries of every type. We too may be open to being “washed of our era”—of joining a deep repentance, renouncing the estranged state of things and rising up from such a washing into a new attitude toward it all. Jesus joined John at the river Jordan.

When have you wished to be washed of your era?

When have you felt that the world’s estrangements from realism were so great that a general catastrophe was surely on the way, and soon?

Mark goes on to proclaim that Jesus will make a huge addition to the revolution launched by the remarkable John, the Baptist. This addition was so significant that John himself, according to Mark, knew that he, John, was not worthy to kneel down and undo the shoes of Jesus. John, Mark indicates, washed us of our evil era, but Jesus will wash us further with the hot fire of God’s own Spirit. What does all that mean? We will have to wait and see as Mark’s story moves along, but at this point we have Mark’s hint that the event of Jesus is a remarkable *coming* of a very radical revolution in human understanding of what it means to be a human being

Mark: 1: 9-11 The Heavenly Birth of Jesus

It was in those days that Jesus arrived from the Galilean village of Nazareth and was baptized by John in the Jordan. All at once, as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open, and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove. A voice came out of Heaven, saying, “You are my dearly-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!”

Almost every phrase that Mark includes in his story has some sort of secret meanings. “*Up out the water*” can pass unnoticed if we do not associate this immersion with dying to the evil era. If we do see the allusion to dying, then “up out of the water” is an allusion to resurrection. In this story Jesus is becoming the resurrected one.

“*The heavens split open*” is an even more cryptic piece of poetry to a modern person who does not know what to make of the word “heaven” and certainly finds it very odd to speak of seeing “the heavens split open.” Translating that phrase from its transcendence metaphorical imagination to an existential transparency type of poetry takes a bit of thoughtfulness. “Heaven” means the realm of Absolute Mystery, and Mark is picturing that dynamic as right above our heads. There is a sort of big punch bowl with stars on it and if that bowl were to split open we would see right into the Eternal heaven. I believe that Mark is thinking more metaphorically and less literally than that picture may sound. Seeing into the Eternal is the heart meaning of the text. As Jesus comes up out of the watery tomb in which John has dunked him, the punch bowl of Awesome Absolute Mystery splits open. What a story!

Next, this profound-eyed person Mark sees another signal of profoundness: “*the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove.*” Spirit, for Mark, is the Absolute Mystery itself manifesting as a state of our whole life sometimes called “Wonder” or “Awe.” But for someone who has the courage for such a dreadful, fascinating state of Awe, this happening is a gentle thing, like a dove settling on head and shoulder.

Finally, Mark gives us one more symbol for how this baptism was an outstanding event: “*A voice came out of Heaven, saying, ‘You are my dearly-beloved Son.’*” We need not believe that a tape recorder would have heard this voice. Mark included this bit of poetic flair to complete his view of the significance of this baptism for this simple roof-repair man’s son from the nowhere of Nazareth. And what does “Son” mean here? It means that Jesus is having a new birth, not of a father from Nazareth, but of a Spirit from Eternity. This is Mark’s “virgin birth” narrative. Mark is implying a virgin birth for Jesus, a birth sired from heaven that was now taking over Jesus’ whole life from his biological birth in Nazareth.

The *Awed One* (Jesus) is filled with *Awe* (Spirit) sourced from the *Awesome* (Eternal Mystery.) This whole secret Trinity of Divinity (Awesome, Awed One, Awe) is happening among us, to us, to humanity in these opening pages of Mark’s story. For the rest of Mark’s strange narrative, Jesus is the washed one, the resurrected one, the beloved of Reality one. Jesus is virgin born among us to lead us into our own profound humanness. For the rest of Mark’s gospel we see in Jesus what this exemplar of resurrected humanity looks like—walking, talking, calling, teaching, healing, feeding, eating, celebrating, living, suffering, dying. Women coming to honor him in his tomb find nothing there, except their own resurrection to Jesus-hood.

So, what might this passage be saying to us today about the living of our own authentic lives and about the power of these Christian symbols for our own depth living? Perhaps we might give Christian symbols a second look. Perhaps we might view these long-preserved stories as being clues to our own most profound matters of living. Perhaps we might ask of Mark and other resurrected witnesses, what must we do to inherit this life abundant. Perhaps we are drawn to read further in Mark's story to see where our own particular healing is required to be washed of our own grim era—washed in order for us to enter here and now into this communion of the saints, this Kingdom of God, this Reign of Reality, this commonwealth of profound realism. Perhaps such an enigmatic interior baptism is our first step, our next step toward beginning a fresh walk with Jesus for the rest of our own life story.

Mark clearly sees Jesus' baptism by John as a new birth in the consciousness of Jesus. If we were using Eastern language we might call it "enlightenment." Using the language that Mark develops toward the end of his story Jesus was experiencing in John's baptism a "death and a resurrection" to profound humanness, to spirit depth, to authenticity incarnate.

The ordinary human ego of Jesus was not destroyed, but that ego ceased to be the identity of this person. Jesus was dead to the evils of his era to the extent that there was nothing left to his identity but his essential authenticity, his profound humanness that was created by Final Reality from the dawn on time. Jesus in this story is a symbol for that profound humanness that the Creator of everything gives to humans before their fall into their estrangements from Reality. Jesus is the "Offspring of God," the new humanity—a humanity that Jesus' healings are going to call forth in others. Perhaps in you. Perhaps in me.

To say all these extreme things about Jesus, at the very beginning of his narrative, means that Mark views Jesus as a human being who has already died to estrangement and been raised up to authentic life. As we will see, Jesus is not intimidated by the entire Roman world and or by Israel's hypocritical religious establishments of compromise, flight, or furious hatred toward it all. Jesus is not intimidated by the prospect of living such a profound life or dying such a profound life at the hands of those he serves.

Matthew and Luke expand on this topic of Jesus being an "Offspring of Final Reality" with stories about Jesus' virgin birth. John's gospel also talks about a second birth that is available to all of us who embrace Jesus's humanity. But at this point in Mark's gospel the meaning of this divine birthing is only hinted—it is still a secret that something very special has appeared in Jesus. In coming chapters we are going to watch what happens to such a person as he (or she or you or me) lives out such profound humanity in social engagement. We are going to see someone who lives the authentic life unto death.

According to the scholarship of Rudolf Bultmann, what baptism came to mean in the early church was threefold: (1) washed of the era of “sin,” (2) sealed within the body of Christ, and (3) filled with the Holy Spirit. All three of these meanings are descriptions of an event of rebirth—drowning our estrangements to death, opening us to our profound authenticity, and facing our future in this “Spirit of Wholeness.”

What experiences in your life seem to correspond with such a profound rebirth?

Mark: 1: 12-13 The Agony of Vocation

Then the Spirit sent him out at once into the desert, and there he remained for forty days while Satan tempted him. During this time no one was with him but wild animals, and only the angels were there to care for him.

The Spirit awareness that manifested in Jesus at this point in Mark’s narrative has an immediate and serious effect on the life of Jesus. The horrifically positive designation “Son of God,” enlightened being, profound humanness drives Jesus into an agonizing solitary period of prayer. We see in this story that the birth of profound humanness in Jesus does not take away the raw humanity of Jesus (or of us), and that Jesus (or any of us) can be tempted to be less than the profound humanness that we are.

This temptation story prefigures the later story Mark tells about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemine—facing being tortured to death the next day. The prospect of death is also present in the 40-day fast story. John the Baptist is due to be jailed and killed. Jesus knows that the mission before him is risky to that extent. He knows that he has the option of backing away from the task of realism and playing it safe. He takes 40 days to prepare himself to stay the course.

In other words, this New Birth into Holy Spirit is a big deal. It sends Jesus (or one of us) into the wilderness—that is, we are taken out of all our taken-for-granted cultural norms and beyond our underestimations of our own true being. Out there beyond all the city lights and good food and safe housing, there in the wilderness Jesus (and we) are put to the test. For forty days Jesus (and we) struggle with the evil option of playing it safe in this world, of giving up the role of being the approved son or daughter of the Infinite. In this wilderness, tempted by the evil options, only the wild animals and the “messengers” from the Awesome All-Powerful Reality look after Jesus (and us). We are alone with this decision. Are we going to cast our entire life and our death into the task of Truth or not. And what is Truth after all? Why not just live the life of being safe for a while longer? Perhaps fitting in with the power in this world is a better option than this radical realism? Perhaps backing quietly into our tomb is a better option than intending our death and our one life into the breach of history?

With such profound choices, Jesus (and anyone) is alone. No other human beings are out there in this place of decision. Just birds and squirrels and foxes and snakes and a

few invisible angels. How shall we understand Mark's term "angels"? I see these angels as symbols for the numinous, that invisible glow of Awe shining through the trees and sand dunes and birds and snakes. Except for these wild companions, and these states of Awe, we are all alone. Yet we are looked after; "The Infinite" is sending us wild nature and the even wilder messengers of Awe to look after us. What does it mean for Awe to look after us? Our Awe experiences help us separate reality from unreality. These messengers from the Awesome are keeping us in touch with Reality. They guide us through the ditches of delusion, if we have ears to hear these voices of our Awe-being.

"Our better angels" (the Awe sent from the Awesome) tell us what is real and what is not real. With help from these "angels" we are able to answer each temptation that comes up from the mighty kingdom of estrangement—that mythic non-world of our own imagination. This is the Jesus' story. His raw humanity is still present. He is tempted in every way that we might be tempted, and he prevails. We can also prevail. This is the secret that Mark is not telling us yet. At this point in his story, Mark is just giving us hints.

As we will see the disciples he calls do not yet see the hints. Like us, they have not yet arrived at the place where they can see and hear. The resurrection experience is still ahead of them. But this is part of the good news for those of us reading this gospel. The resurrection experience is indeed ahead of us, if we persist in being open to what is Real. Our profound humanness, our Jesus essence, is there for the finding. And when and if we arrive, we will be astonished like women fleeing from the tomb back to Galilee to look once again at how the healing ministry takes place.

When have you experienced being looked after--not in any magical way, not in an external way--just looked after in this deeply interior experiences of nature from our "better angels"?

How are you been tempted to underestimate yourself?

How do you play it safe rather than play it real?

How do you try to be somebody you are not, rather than being who you are?

What would it mean for you to wrestle to the ground your temptations to be less than a fully approved son/daughter of the Infinite Silence of Absolute Mystery?

Mark 1:14-15 Jesus Starts His Vocation

It was after John's arrest that Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, saying, "The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news.

After John was imprisoned (his ministry was over and his death eminent), Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming "good news from the Infinite Finality. If we want to speculate

about the state of consciousness in Mark's Jesus, we might guess that John's imprisonment and possible death was a crisis for Jesus that opened in him the need for him to be a replacement for John, yes more than a replacement, to be a new phase of the movement of spirit that John had begun.

John had called people out to the edge of existence to repent and to be open to a fresh start. Jesus took this edge experience into the villages of Galilee and eventually into the cultural capital of Jerusalem. Further, he announced that the fresh start that John was awaiting was already underway. Manifest within the responses that people were making to Jesus' teaching, "the Kingdom of God," (as Jesus called it) was breaking through "right now."

Mark's Jesus in announcing that humanity's waiting period is now over; the Reign of the Infinite is closing in on the reign of estrangement; detach yourself from the existing orders of unreality and trust your whole being to this fresh start."

Mark's often used phrase "the Kingdom of God" can be translated "Final Reality's imperial rule" for the word "God" meant to Mark something Eternal in the living experience of our everyday lives. I also like the phrase, "The reign of the Infinite Silence," for that phrase at least provokes us to look in the direction of a numinous Presence in our daily lives. Clearly, Mark and Mark's Jesus are not talking about a literal invasion of magical forces from some other world. Nor is Mark talking about the literal end of this world. Mark is talking about the end of the reign of Satan, which means the end of the reign of wretched inauthentic living within our personal and social lives.

In summary, the coming "reign of God" means at least these three things: (1) the actuality that the Infinite Reality always has and always will reign over finite processes, (2) the inward submission by humans to the inescapable Presence of the Infinite, and (3) the manifestation of this Presence in all our daily living. Most important of all, this is a breakthrough in our own freedom to act with real-world care for our neighbors and ourselves.

In other words, Mark is saying that the essence of Jesus' preaching was "The Infinite is making an approach to our lives and opening new doors for us; therefore, "Let us repent from our old dysfunctional ways and open ourselves to having the Infinite reign in our lives." Repentance here does not mean merely saying we are sorry; it means an "about face" in our attitudes and behaviors. The fresh start implied here is letting what is Really Real emerge in you as the realistic living of your actual life.

What would it mean for you to repent on behalf of the evil times in which you live?

What would it mean for you to let the Infinite Reality reign in your life?

How does this interpretation of the phrase “Kingdom of God” help you understand better the core topic of Mark’s poetic book?

Mark writes another fifteen and a half chapters, but in a somewhat cryptic way, he has already said it all. Mark will continue assembling resources from the recent Jesus heritage and from the ancient Hebrew heritage to support his grasp of this “good news.” As we will see, Mark does this in a very clever, highly organized, and thoughtful manner.

Mark 1:16-20 Becoming Fishers of Men

As he walked along the shore of the Lake of Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the water. “Come and follow me, and I will teach you to catch men!” he cried.

At once they dropped their nets, and followed him.

Then he went a little further along the shore and saw James the son of Zebedee, aboard a boat with his brother John, overhauling their nets. At once he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and went off after him.

This is a remarkable bit of drama. These men, when asked by Jesus, simply dropped their entire life vocations and picked up another vocation: “following Jesus.” Mark seems to believe that the very presence of the fully resurrected human (Jesus or Mark or, yes, one of us living today) is so powerful that sensitive members of the society will leave whatever they are doing and follow wherever he or she or you or me is going.

If a scientific biography of Jesus were possible, we might find that the historical Jesus of Nazareth actually said a bit more to these disciples than, “Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” This is Mark’s interpretive summary. Mark is not recording historical information; he is dramatizing the nature of running into a fully authentic human as an “Either/Or” confrontation—either continue in the common slime or start a new life. Either you keep on living your familiar unawakened life, or you make a complete departure toward becoming awake and alive.

This new departure in living includes engaging in the vocation of “putting your hooks” into other people with the purpose of enabling them also be awake and alive. This sort of “evangelism” has nothing to do with merely expanding a religious institution. This “preaching of good news” has to do with robbing delusion of its slaves and setting people free to be who they essentially are. Movements and fresh institutions may flow out of such evangelism, but these results are not the essence of preaching this “good news.” Healing lives is the focus of such preaching, then and now.

When have you dropped everything and followed someone?

What Either/Or moments have come for you in your life?

How do you sense yourself “called” to be awake and to be an awakener of others?

What feelings attend such a calling for you?

Mark 1:21-22 The Authority of Authenticity

They arrived at Capernaum, and on the Sabbath day Jesus walked straight into the synagogue and began teaching. They were amazed at his way of teaching, for he taught with the ring of authority—quite unlike the scribes.

Jesus is a head-on attack against what we might call “scribal authority”—the authority of the written tradition, the authority of the Bible, the authority of the Church, the authority of the Pope. Jesus speaks and asks his followers to speak with the authority of authenticity. Such authority resides in the speaker’s obedience to Reality. Such authority speaks to others because this same authority (obedience to Reality) can be accessed in the hearers. What is being said is *authoritatively* true, not because the Scripture says so, or the Pope says so, or because some sort of reason says so. It is true because we can see it, hear it, feel it, experience it here and now, with the eyes and ears and guts of our own Spirit being. This strange authority of Jesus is not a sociological authority of any sort; it is the authority of authenticity. It is authenticity speaking to the authenticity within the hearers.

How have you at some time leaned for your certainty on the Christian Scriptures?

How have you at some time leaned for your certainty on some other “religious authority”?

How have you broken with or subverted some of the authoritative norms expected of you?

How have you rejected all authority, including the authority of authenticity?

What does it mean for you to hear and honor the authority of authenticity?

Mark 1: 23-28 The First Healing: an Unclean Spirit Obeys

All at once, a man in the grip of an evil spirit appeared in the synagogue shouting out, “What have you got to do with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to kill us? I know who you are—you’re God’s holy one!”

But Jesus cut him short and spoke sharply, “Hold your tongue and get out of him!”

At this the evil spirit convulsed the man, let out a loud scream and left him. Everyone present was so astounded that people kept saying to each other, “What on earth has happened? This new teaching has authority behind it. Why he even gives his orders to evil spirits and they obey him!”

And his reputation spread like wild-fire through the whole Galilean district.

The unclean spirit that resides in each of us recognizes the authority of authenticity and cries out in fear. It may seem strange that an unclean spirit would know something about Jesus that remains a secret to the disciples as well as to the sleeping masses of

humanity. But according to Mark, an unclean spirit knows authenticity when authenticity is encountered. Why? Let us guess that it is because the unclean spirit (inauthenticity) is being threatened with death by authenticity. The presence of authenticity is so threatening to inauthenticity that attention has to be paid.

What is an unclean spirit? We have a different psychology in the 21st Century. We know that there are no gremlin-type beings who crawl around inside our consciousness. We know that these inner pieces of estranged consciousness have been created by our own humanity's essential freedom. An evil spirit is a human choice that has been made our lives no longer free. Such a choice sticks, so to speak. It has become a bondage instead of our freedom. We are then driven by these evil spirits, even though these "spirits" are nothing but our own human freedom gone astray. Mark and the other lucid people in Mark's era were using the best psychology they had for talking about these estrangements from Reality—from that Final Reality than never ceases being the Final Reality. Poetically speaking, it is understandable that these estranged fragments of human consciousness were pictured as alien persons—evil spirits inside of us that have taken over our bodies from our essential freedom and created goodness.

From the perspective of biblical theologizing these inner beings were states of uncleanness—not an uncleanness of body, but an inner rebellion from the Clean Truth of the Infinite Realism.

Søren Kierkegaard called this uncleanness "despair." We are in despair because we do not choose to be what we actually are, a finite and dying being in a self-aware relationship with the Source of our life and our death. Despair is dirty because it messes up everything in our lives, our relationships, our thinking, our vocation, our presence.

Kierkegaard has also helped us understand how we can interpret for our times these "indwelling evil beings from another realm" as "evil-relatednesses"—as disrelationships within our inescapable relationship with the Infinite Presence. Our inescapable Spirit-relatedness has two forms: (1) authenticity (willing to be what we are) and (2) inauthenticity (unwilling to be what we are). "Evil spirits" was Mark's way of picturing this tragic condition of "not being human."

When have you witnessed your inauthenticity crying out in the presence of someone's authenticity?

When have you noticed that inauthenticity is humanly created?

In Mark's story, after this particular unclean spirit recognizes Jesus' authenticity and cries out in fear, Jesus responds, "Hold your tongue and get of him." At this point in Mark's story the identity of Jesus is still a secret. Only the evil spirits recognize who

Jesus is. The disciples and the crowd only see that there is a power to command evil spirits.

Can we image ourselves in Jesus role saying to a fragment of some person's unclean consciousness, "Quite down; leave this person alone; depart the premises; give up your rule over this human life; release this person from your slavery"?

In Mark's story the unclean spirit with a loud shriek leaves. Something actually dies here, but it is not the natural person of that man that dies. Death happens to some aspect of that person's despairing disrelatedness with Final Reality, the Infinite, God. Jesus's command is not the immediate cause of this exodus of the evil spirit. The man's own authentic conscious is the immediate cause of the exodus. Jesus's command to the demon awakens in this man his own power to do the exorcism. We need to know this as we, like Jesus, take on Jesus' role of being a healer of the spirit sick. You or I or Jesus is merely an assisting doctor: Reality and the patient's own freedom is the actual healer. We healers simply call forth in others their own authenticity.

We do indeed see in Jesus "a new kind of teaching"—a teaching backed by the authority of authenticity. And this authority of authenticity resides both within Jesus and within the man who is harboring the unclean spirit. Jesus orders the unclean spirit to leave, and in this case the essential being of the sick man models Jesus. It is important to insist that both Jesus and the sick man are ordering this unclean spirit to leave. If the man does not participate, the healing does not happen, as many other New Testament stories testify. The healed person is the healing agent; Jesus is but the audit of our sickness and the call to accept healing rather than sickness. The healed person actively, intentionally accesses Reality's healing powers. In several other such stories, we find Jesus saying that it is the "faith" of the person being healed that does the healing. But the role of the Jesus-healer is important. We are asleep to our humanity until it is called for.

What a story! Inauthenticity must obey the command of authenticity! Sin is actually *nothing* but a bad twist in something good. That "something good," is our authentic life, and our authentic life is stronger than all the bad twists.

How have you experienced aspects of your own inauthenticity leaving when you commanded it to do so?

When have you witnessed such healing going on in other people?

How do you feel about playing the Jesus role in such healings?

Mark 1:29-31 The Second Healing: a Down and Fevered Woman is Raised Up

Then he got up and went straight from the synagogue to the house of Simon and Andrew, accompanied by James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever, and they lost no time in telling Jesus about her. He went up to her, took her hand and helped her to her feet. The fever left her, and she began to see to their needs.

This is the second healing story. The healing of many people is alluded to in this gospel, but Mark only tells *twelve* stories about Israelites being healed, plus one story about healing a Gentile woman's daughter. This Gentile woman is the one who impresses Jesus with her retort about picking up crumbs from the children's table. (*Twelve* is a symbol for the twelve tribes of Israel.) By telling twelve healings of Hebrews and only one Gentile, Mark is indicating that though Jesus focused his ministry on the Jewish people, there has been and there are going to be plenty of crumbs left over for the entire human family. This food multiplies brilliantly.

The extent to which Mark is telling parables with these healing stories has often been overlooked by the literalistic mentality so rampant in contemporary Christendom. We who long for miracles and magic have tended to view these healing stories literally and thus miss the Spirit purpose behind Mark's amazing fiction. Here is a list of Mark's twelve healing stories told about Hebrew people; think of them as parables pointing to the restoration of various Spirit aspects of human authenticity:

1. A man controlled by an unclean spirit
2. A woman down in bed with a fever
3. A leper—an unclean outcast from society
4. A man paralyzed, prone on a mat like dead
5. A Sabbath synagogue worshiper with a crippled hand
6. An uncontrollable man in the tombs by the sea with a "Legion" of filthy spirits who enter 2000 pigs who are drowned in the sea
7. A woman unclean with a 12-year old flow of vaginal blood
8. A 12-year old daughter of a synagogue leader who is in a deathlike sleep
9. A deaf-mute who can't hear and can't speak
10. A blind man who needs two tries to open his eyes widely enough to see clearly
11. A violent mute-spirit the disciples can't heal because it takes more prayer
12. The brash, blind beggar met at Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. The name of this man was Bartimaeus, (the son of Timaeus). Timaeus means "highly prized."

Let us examine further the second of these healings. Simon's mother is *down* in bed and Jesus takes her hand and raises her up to cool servanthood. This is an allusion to the resurrection. She is *down* with a fever. This is an allusion to the overheating of our lives by some Spirit estrangement. Being down with an overheated malady is preventing this woman from serving others. She is not crying out with an unclean

spirit. She is not blind, deaf, lame, or leprous. She is just *down*. She is just feverish. For all practical purposes she might be considered *dead*. Jesus raises her *up*. The fever leaves her, and she begins serving other people.

Spiritually speaking, when do you recall being down? What was that like?

If you recognize being down with a spirit fever, what is that like?

In what way might a Christian community be down in spirit, suffering from a fever, and thus useless for serving their region of people?

Mark 1:32-34 A Secret Identity

Late that evening, after sunset, they kept bringing to him all who were sick or troubled by evil spirits. The whole population of the town gathered round the doorway. And he healed great numbers of people who were suffering from various forms of disease. In many cases he expelled evil spirits; but he would not allow them to say a word, for they knew perfectly well who he was.

At **sundown** they came to be healed. Mark never uses a single word accidentally. “Sundown” symbolizes something. Perhaps people come to Jesus as the sun is setting because in the full light of day, they are too ashamed of their sicknesses. Perhaps people come as it is getting dark because Mark is actually talking here about dark experiences in our deep inner beings.

Why does Mark have Jesus ask the demons not to speak about who Jesus is? Mark signals again and again about how Jesus’ radical authenticity is a secret. The masses, not even the disciples, know the secret. It takes very special eyes to see who Jesus is. Yet the demons recognize who Jesus is. Apparently, demons are profoundly threatened by Jesus’ very presence. His authenticity gets their attention. Authenticity threatens inauthenticity.

“Well, who is Jesus?” the reader might ask. Mark will focus on the question, “Who is Jesus?” throughout his gospel. But for now, Mark has Jesus command the demons, who recognize his power, to keep Jesus’ identity secret.

Today, many people who do not know the secret, believe that “who Jesus is” can be put on billboards and understood by a passing highway traveler. But for Mark, “who Jesus is” is a secret. And as we shall see, those who learn this secret are few. And when they do learn it, they are so shocked that they are filled with dread. But that is getting ahead of Mark’s story. For now, only evil spirits know the secret of who Jesus is. The disciples, the crowds, the religious authorities do not know. Evil spirits know; but unawake humans, and not-yet-fully awake humans, do not know.

With whom in this story do you identify? Those bringing sick people? The sick people? The disciples watching? The general population? Jesus?

How do you respond to Mark's emphasis on the secrecy of Jesus' identity?

Mark 1:35-39 Very Early, Very Dark, and Very Alone

Then, in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Simon and his companions went in search of him, and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

"Then we will go somewhere else, to the neighboring towns," he replied, "so that I may give my message there too—that is why I have come."

So he continued preaching in their synagogues and expelling evil spirits throughout the whole of Galilee.

Early, dark, and completely alone--this is the time and the place when and where Jesus prays. Jesus does not consult with the crowds about what to do with his life. He does not consult with his intimate circle about what to do with his life. Jesus, completely alone, consults with the Infinite Reality. Mark does not say what went on in this prayer time, or what sort of prayers were prayed or what prayer is. Jesus might have practiced silent meditation. All Mark tells us is that Jesus rose early and in the dark and all alone spent *time* in undivided attention to his relationship with the Infinite.

What does it say to you about Jesus that he needed to spend so much time in prayer?

And what is prayer anyhow?

The disciples had to go find him to tell him something they thought he needed to know, "The masses are looking for you." But Jesus does not say, "Good, I'll be right down to attend to their needs." He says, "Let's go somewhere else." He tells them what his task is: to speak to the other villages of Galilee. What is this message that is even more important than healing more sick people?

Apparently, Jesus' mission is to speak to ordinary people in the outback villages of Galilee, a tiny district of Jewish humanity. How, we might wonder, did Jesus come to this conclusion? To such questions, many modern Christians have become accustomed to giving easy answers like "God told him" or "Jesus was God." Mark, however, avoids such easy answers. He does not tell us how Jesus knew what to do, but he implies that the certainty of decision that Jesus displayed was related to the hours he spent in prayer—early, alone, and in the dark with the Infinite Reality.

How might spending time in prayer affect your own confidence in choosing what you need to do with your life?

Mark 1:40-45 The Third Healing: An Unclean Outcast

Then a leper came to Jesus, knelt in front of him and appealed to him, "If you want to, you can make me clean."

Jesus was filled with pity for him, and stretched out his hand and placed it on the leper, saying, "Of course I want to—be clean!"

At once the leprosy left him and he was quite clean. Jesus sent him away there and then with the strict injunction, “Mind you say nothing at all to anybody. Go straight off and show yourself to the priest, and make the offerings for your cleansing which Moses prescribed, as public proof of your recovery.”

But he went off and began to talk a great deal about it in public, spreading his story far and wide. Consequently, it became impossible for Jesus to show his face in the towns and he had to stay outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from all quarters.

Lepers were outsiders, health risks, considered unclean, unfit for normal social life. To restore the unclean to social life somehow hit a nerve in the life of the masses. To see and experience such healings, they crowd around Jesus. Mark implies that Jesus has a deeper healing in mind than social acceptability, one for which people will not so readily come for healing. What does a true compassion for all sorts and qualities of human beings look like? What is this deeper more invisible uncleanness that Jesus has come to heal?

Jesus goes to people who are considered untouchable, socially repulsive, persons way beyond the norm, riffraff, dirty, smelly, bag ladies, dope-heads, crazies, all symbolized by this worst-of-all dirtiness—the disgusting disease of leprosy.

Who are the most disgusting outsiders today?

What would it take to restore these conscious beings to normal social life?

When have you found yourself viewed by the society that surrounds you as disgusting ?

Chapter Two

Mark 2: 1-12 The Fourth Healing: A Man Paralyzed Like Dead

When he re-entered Capernaum some days later, a rumor spread that he was in somebody’s house. Such a large crowd collected that while he was giving them his message it was impossible even to get near the doorway. Meanwhile, a group of people arrived to see him, bringing with them a paralytic whom four of them were carrying. And when they found it was impossible to get near him because of the crowd, they removed the tiles from the roof over Jesus’ head and let down the paralytic’s bed through the opening. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man on the bed, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

But some of the scribes were sitting there silently asking themselves, “Why does this man talk such blasphemy? Who can possibly forgive sins but God?”

Jesus realized instantly what they were thinking, and said to them, “why must you argue like this in your minds? Which do you suppose is easier—to say to a paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or ‘Get up, pick up your bed and walk’? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has full authority to forgive sins on earth, I say to you,”—and here he spoke to the paralytic—“Get up, pick up your bed and go home.”

At once the man sprang to his feet, picked up his bed and walked off in full view of them all. Everyone was amazed, praised God, and said, “We have never seen anything like this before.”

This man is paralyzed. He is *down* like *dead*. He is carried by four bearers. A hole is made and he is lowered down. Down in the bottom of the hole that they “dug” in the roof of this house is Jesus, and Jesus says to this prone man, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” These allusions to death and resurrection are clearly intentional. Mark intends for us to “get it,”—to hear this Spirit lesson: “the spiritually dead are raised up through forgiveness.”

Mark has introduced a new theme: “forgiveness.” The religious scholars in Mark’s story take offense that a mere human being can declare forgiveness. “Only God,” they say, “can forgive.” But Jesus, sensing their rejection, clarifies that the son of Adam (that is, any authentic human being) has authority to forgive sins. But Jesus does not say to the man, “I forgive you.” He says “Your sins are forgiven” The meaning here is that Jesus is the Mouth of God speaking for God about a forgiveness that is extended to all of us. Mark further clarifies that accepting forgiveness and rising up from your paralysis are one and the same thing. The down-like-dead man, hearing that he is forgiven, gets up, picks up his mat, and goes home. Forgiveness is not an excuse for remaining dead. Forgiveness is a fresh start in being alive.

Some of the people standing around feel the Awe of this. They become ecstatic. They extol the Awesome Infinite Silence for confronting them with this possibility. They exclaim, “We’ve never seen the likes of this!”

Now what is Mark talking about with this story? What is going on here that could be so Awesome, so new, so important? Clearly, Mark is talking about more than the literal elements of the story. Honestly, who cares whether or not some paralyzed man who lived 2000 years ago got back on his feet? Mark is telling us that Jesus is the one who meets us, each of us, at the lowest point of our spirit condition--when we are indeed dead in our despair, unable even to walk our lives; when we are out flat, having to be carried by others. When despair has blocked all possibility of going on with our lives, at this point Jesus says to us: “Your despair is forgiven. Everything in your past or in your present life over which you are despairing is forgiven. You have, right now, a fresh start before you; arise and walk it.” When some despairing person actually accepts such forgiveness, all of us feel the Awe.

When have you seen forgiveness put someone on their feet?

When has forgiveness put you on your feet?

What is the difference between declaring God’s forgiveness and simply forgiving someone yourself?

Mark 2:13-15 The Fifth Disciple: A Despised Tax Collector

Then Jesus went out again by the lake-side and the whole crowd came to him, and he continued to teach them.

As Jesus went on his way, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at his desk in the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me!"

Levi got up and followed him.

By the sea, near water, Jesus accompanied by huge crowds is walking along teaching. He sees Levi, a tax collector, sitting at his work. This man works for the Roman tyrants. Few tax collectors were fair, and they were generally despised. Jesus picks out this man and says, "Follow me." Like the four fishermen earlier in Mark's story, Levi immediately drops his entire vocation and follows Jesus.

The word "following" in this story means walking with Jesus wherever he goes, literally on foot. Also, "following Jesus" is a metaphor for taking an inward journey. This journey begins with hearing a call, and this results in leaving everything and following that call.

Is your profession or job mostly despised by society or mostly honored?

When have you left something big in order to respond to a call to a more authentic walk of your life?

Mark 2:15-17 Healing for the Despised

Later, when Jesus was sitting at dinner in Levi's house, a large number of tax-collectors and disreputable folk came in and joined him and his disciples. For there were many such people among his followers. When the scribes and Pharisees saw him eating in the company of tax-collectors and outsiders, they remarked to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?"

When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "It is not the fit and flourishing who need the doctor, but those who are ill. I did not come to invite the 'righteous', but the 'sinners'.

Jesus is eating with Levi and other tax collectors, and sinners. The act of eating with someone was strongly symbolic of comradeship in Mark's and Jesus' culture. The religious scholars in Mark's story question Jesus' behavior. In the scholars' minds, he is "running with the wrong crowd." Here Mark inserts one of the great sayings from the Jesus tradition: "Since when do the able-bodied need a doctor? Rather, it's the sick. I did not come to invite religious folk, but sinners."

What does this saying mean to Mark in 65 C.E.? Mark sees Jesus as a doctor, a healer, a restorer of authenticity in human beings. Mark implies that the sick are not just tax collectors and harlots, but religious scholars as well. "Coming to the doctor" only occurs to those who are admitting their deep illusions, estrangements, bondages, despairs, etc.—admitting the sicknesses that are running and ruining their lives. This is a core teaching: admitting our spirit sickness is the first step in following Jesus.

When have you sought a Spirit doctor?

What maladies brought you to the doctor?

What healing did you receive?

Mark 2:18-20 Feasting and Fasting

The disciples of John and those of the Pharisees were fasting. They came and said to Jesus, “Why do those who follow John or the Pharisees keep fasts, but your disciples do nothing of the kind?”

Jesus told them, “Can you expect wedding-guest to fast in the bridegroom’s presence? Fasting is out of the question as long as they have the bridegroom with them. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them—that will be the time for them to fast.

The keepers of traditions, in this case the tradition of regular fasting, criticize Jesus in terms of what others usually do. They imply that Jesus’ disciples are practicing an inferior or lax religion. Jesus reminds them that fasting is inconsistent with a wedding celebration. He implies that his presence, like the presence of a bridegroom, calls for feasting or celebration. The underlying issue here is making your religion match the living reality of your life. The Spirit reality of your life has priority over doing what people normally do. Doing religious practices because “that is what is normally done” is not the Jesus way. Authenticity comes first, religious practice comes second. This is the guideline for our religious practices.

When in your Spirit journey have you fasted or followed any type of ascetic religious practice?

When in your Spirit journey have you feasted or followed some type of celebrative religious practice?

Mark makes clear in the second part of Jesus’ reply (probably written by Mark himself) that there is nothing wrong with fasting in its proper place. When death and sorrow are present, fasting is appropriate. Mark makes allusion to Jesus’ death, indicating that the “crucifixion” periods of our experience are the appropriate times for fasting. Here again the underlying teaching is the same: the Spirit reality of our lives precedes our choosing appropriate religious practices.

How do your current religious practices relate to your current journey of Spirit?

Mark 2: 21-22 New Wineskins

“Nobody,” he continued, “sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on to an old coat. If he does, the new patch tears away from the old and the hole is worse than ever. And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine bursts the skins, the wine is spilt and the skins are ruined. No, new wine must go into new wineskins.”

At this point in his narrative, Mark includes this Jesus-parable to further elaborate the theme that Spirit precedes religious practices. Mark is telling us that following Jesus involves a new Spirit reality that cannot be held in the old religious wineskins of first

century legalism. In case we do not get the wineskin metaphor, Mark is also telling us that this new Spirit of following Jesus requires a whole new piece of religious cloth, not merely a patch on the current religious fabric. Any patch that expresses this fresh Spirit will tear loose from the old religious garments. Mark, we must suppose, was already experiencing this tearing loose from traditional Judaism. In his writing of this Gospel narrative, Mark, is creating new religious wineskins for holding the fresh wine of Spirit that following Jesus includes. Or to use the second metaphor, Mark is creating a new whole cloth with which to clothe his new Spirit in historical dress.

With a deeper that usual discussion of Mark's narrative, we who are living today may be able to join Mark in doing for our own time a similar creating of new religious wineskins or whole-new-cloth religious forms that hold the Jesus spirit. So let us face this challenge of viewing our own ongoing theologizing and community building as pursuing the command or the calling of the Markian revelation to do for the 21st century what Mark was doing for the first century. This means finding and/or creating religious understandings, practices, and forms of communal life that can contain and proclaim the Spirit that expresses the enduring Christian revelation to which Mark is witnessing.

The Christian tradition is valuable, but traditionalism is a cop out. Tradition may lead to Spirit, but Spirit essentially preceded tradition. The inherited religious wineskins of Christian practice are not working, or not working well, in doing this calling that Mark is modeling for us. We live in a time of world-wide change in religious forms. This complicated revolution is taking place in every religion, including Christianity. An effective movement toward a vital and relevant Christianity for our time will "tear loose" from our inherited "Christian" practices. Mark supports us in getting ourselves ready to do something different than minor reforms, and not be intimidated when we are criticized for "not doing what traditional practitioners of Christianity customarily do."

What customary practices of Christianity do you find lacking in spirit effectiveness?

How are you experiencing the challenge to do things that Christians don't customarily do?

Mark 2:23-28 Lord of the Rules

One day he happened to be going through the cornfields on the Sabbath day. And his disciples, as they made their way along, began to pick the ears of corn. The Pharisees said to him, "Look at that! Why should they do what is forbidden on the Sabbath day?"

Then he spoke to them. "Have you never read what David did, when he and his companions were hungry? Haven't you read how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was High Priest, and ate the presentation loaves, which nobody is allowed to eat, except the priests—and gave some of the bread to his companions? The Sabbath," he continued, "was made for man's sake; man was not made for the sake of the Sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

In these verses, Mark continues his theme of creating and practicing appropriate religion. Mark takes on the entire Mosaic law. The Sabbath rule was one of the ten commandments. Neither Mark nor Jesus was criticizing the goodness of the practice of setting aside one day out of seven for rest and depth reflections. But the Pharisees' meticulous observation of the religious rules, did not satisfy Jesus or Mark. Jesus and his disciples practiced a flexibility that was offensive to these religious scholars. The bite of these verses for our own lives can be felt if we substitute our favorite rules in place of the word "Sabbath." So you could read this passage like this:

Rules, principles, and moral practices were created for human beings, not human beings for the rules. The authentic human being is lord over all the rules. In other words, accessing authentic spirit precedes following the rules in whatever ways the rule may apply. And we must do the applying with our own creative Spirit freedom. And most of all we need to learn that following the rules does not, in and of itself, lead to spirit authenticity. A deeper following is required for healing our lives.

What are the "rules" that you feel you must always obey?

Which of these "rules" might you need to consider breaking under some rule-breaking circumstance?

The audacious freedom implied in this teaching shocks moralists in any century. If there are no rules which one has to always obey, how can we ever be certain that we are doing the right thing? The answer is, "We can't." Absolute certainty is forbidden the human species. Freedom is our essential lot. Here is the actual Spirit truth: in order to be authentic, we must act without certainty. We must obey the obligation to render free acts in the midst of moral uncertainty and ethical ambiguity. Time-tested rules can assist us in making our decisions, but the rules cannot give us certainty that we are doing the right thing. Rules can serve us, but they cannot justify us; and they must not run our lives. The authentic human is *lord of the rules*.

Both Jesus and Mark commend an unconventional sort of certainty--the certainty that you and I are free beings and thus "lord" over all the rules. We even create whatever new rules are needed to serve ourselves and others. ***But the rules do not rule us.*** *The rules may express Spirit, but Spirit is never contained in any set of rules.*

What does it feel like to break good rules that are not good enough for guiding your authentic actions?

Chapter Three

Mark 3:1-6 The Fifth Healing: A Crippled Religious Man

On another occasion when he went into the synagogue, there was a man there whose hand was shriveled, and they were watching Jesus closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, so that they

might bring a charge against him. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up and come out here in front!”

Then he said to them, “Is it right to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do harm? Is it right to save life or to kill?”

There was a dead silence. Then Jesus, deeply hurt as he sensed their inhumanity, looked round in anger at the faces surrounding him, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” And he stretched it out, and the hand was restored as sound as the other one. The Pharisees walked straight out and discussed with Herod’s party how they could have Jesus put out of the way.

Mark is implying that these obstinate rule-keepers are crippled and are crippling other people, whereas Jesus’ purpose is not to cripple, but to *bring life*. And he intends to do this on the Sabbath day or on every other day. To the moralistically crippled people of his era, Jesus says, “Hold out your crippled hand.”

Those who do this are restored. But the moralists are furious. They plot to get rid of this “authentic human” in their midst. He is an attack on their moral certainty and their false confidence of being better than other people—indeed, before the Final “judgement court,” they have a false confidence that they are better than they actually are.

Where have you seen moralists become furious with those who manifest authentic freedom?

When have you yourself been furious at some one’s immorality?

What is the moralism that lies behind that fury?

How has your moralism been crippling to your own life?

Mark 3: 7-19 The Exodus of a New Israel

Jesus now retired to the lake-side with his disciples. A huge crowd of people followed him, not only from Galilee, but from Judea, Jerusalem and Idumea, some from the district beyond the Jordan and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. This vast crowd came to him because they had heard about the sort of things he was doing. So Jesus told his disciples to have a small boat kept in readiness for him, in case the people should crowd him too closely. For he healed so many people that all those who were in pain kept pressing forward to touch him with their hands. Evil spirits, as soon as they saw him, acknowledged his authority and screamed, “You are the Son of God!”

But he warned them repeatedly that they must not make him known.

Later he went up on to the hill-side and summoned the men whom he wanted, and they went up to him. He appointed a band of twelve to be his companions, whom he could send out to preach, with power to drive out evil spirits. These were the twelve he appointed: Peter (which was the new name he gave Simon), James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother (He gave them the name of Boanerges, which means the “Thunderers”.) Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Patriot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

In these verses Mark does a sort of review of all the themes of his story. He mentions again: going to the sea, being followed by huge crowds, unclean spirits crying out about Jesus’ identity, but being warned not to tell his secret. Then we see Jesus going up a

mountain like Moses and forming a group of 12 who are to (1) be his companions, (2) be sent out to speak, and (3) be given authority to drive out demons.

Who is this guy, Jesus? What is he doing? Why is he doing it? Mark wants his story to raise such questions. Also, Mark's first readers would have noticed some things in Mark's story that we who are forgetful of our Old Testament stories might not notice. Moses also went down to the sea followed by huge crowds. Moses also went up a mountain to organize structures for that community of wanderers. When that Mosaic heritage got established in the promised land, there were 12 tribes. Twelve became a symbol for the wholeness of the People of God.

Mark clearly wants to indicate to his readers that a new or renewed people of God is being formed. The old traditions are not being entirely abandoned, yet a fresh sort of exodus experience is happening.

Also let us notice this curious fact about the list of disciples: the name "Levi," who was called earlier from his tax booth, is not included among the 12. Obviously, Jesus had many more disciples than 12. And we don't actually know whether or not this idea of 12 originated with the historical Jesus or with later story tellers. Probably, Jesus did have a sort of inner circle—those who were in his "leadership training school," his hope for leaving behind him a lineage of teachers. But the names of these persons are not actually known. This particular naming of the twelve probably represents Mark's own creativity rather than that of the historical Jesus himself. So why does Mark not mention the name Levi, whose calling he has already included in his story?

It is worth noting that the ancient Israelites had an "odd tribe" called "Levi" which was not one of the 12 tribes. The Levites were a "tribe" of teaching priests who had covenant renewal functions. They were understood to be descendants of Moses. Surely Mark's mentioning of the name Levi while leaving Levi off the list of twelve had something to do with this heritage of the Levites. But what? It probably fits into Mark's whole image of Jesus as the instigator of a new Israel. Jesus himself is also an odd thirteenth person. Jesus is a Levite, in the sense of being a teacher of the heritage and performs a covenant renewal function.

Clearly, Mark is not recording accurate historical details about the movement that was organized by the historical Jesus. Rather, he is writing a story in which he is painting a portrait of Jesus and his intimate circle as "first fruits of a new Israel." These twelve are being prepared to lead crowds through a new exodus, and thereby become a new community of trust in that All Powerful Final Reality that none of us can escape.

What strikes you most about Mark's allusions to the Old Testament?

In what ways do you see yourself dedicated to a true continuation of a revered tradition that you feel others misinterpret?

Mark 3:20-30 Has Jesus Lost his Mind?

Then he went indoors, but again such a crowd collected that it was impossible for them even to eat a meal. When his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, for people were saying, “He must be mad!”

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying that he was possessed by Beelzebub, and that he drove out devils because he was in league with the prince of devils. So Jesus called them to him and spoke to them in a parable—“How can Satan be the one who drives out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot last either. And if Satan leads a rebellion against Satan—his days are certainly numbered. No one can break into a strong man’s house and steal his property, without first tying up the strong man hand and foot. But if he did that, he could ransack the whole house.

“Believe me, all men’s sins can be forgiven and their blasphemies. But there can never be any forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is an eternal sin.” He said this because they were saying, “He is in the power of an evil spirit.”

Now Jesus goes back home and the crowds gather. His relatives come to get him, for they think he has lost his mind. To be the authentic human in the midst of an inauthentic society appears to be madness. Apparently, one of the risks of participation in the Jesus-exodus of authentic Spirit was (and still is) being misunderstood by most people.

When has your journey toward authenticity appeared to others as losing your mind?

The religious authorities take an even dimmer view. They defend their false, shallow, and rigid righteousness by declaring this “authentic human” to be evil. Even though they actually see that truly evil stuff is being overcome in people’s lives. Nevertheless, they cannot accept the implication that this “nut case” is an expression of goodness. Here is their “brilliant” explanation: “He drives out demons because he is under the control of the head demon.”

Jesus pokes fun at their explanation: “If the government of evil is divided against itself, it will not stand. You can’t enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless you first tie up the strong man.”

Mark assumes here that Jesus has indeed wrestled the rule of Satan to the ground. Jesus has, inside himself, tied up this “potentiality for estrangement” so that it does not operate in his life. This is the key to his healing power: he has defeated Spirit-sickness inside himself; therefore, he can call on this same defeat to happen in the lives of others—releasing that same authentic “Holiness of Spirit” that is the essence of us all.

Mark adds to this discussion a sobering warning: for anyone coming in touch with this essential “goodness,” everything “evil” in their lives will be forgiven, but those who defiantly condemn the “good Spirit” as evil are creating in themselves an unforgivable relationship with the goodness of their humanity. That is, the rejection of the good as

the evil creates a log jam in the process of healing, for such defiance means not repenting of the evil, or accepting that fresh start offered by the assurance of forgiveness..

This sober warning should not be taken moralistically—that is, we need not be taken up in worry about whether we have done some deed or other that is so gross it will not be forgiven. Rather, this frightful warning is given to the defensive person in this present moment—someone who instead of admitting his or her own guilt and thus being forgiven, defiantly renames good evil and evil good. This depth of defiance is unforgivable precisely because it is a rejection of forgiveness for our lives, a reject of the fresh start within what we can experience as our essential goodness. Mark’s Jesus is saying to us, “Don’t do this! Admit your estrangement, accept your forgiveness, and live your fresh start. Forgiveness and a fresh start can be part of each and every choice we make. And forgiveness has to be accepted for it to be a fresh start.

When most recently have you faced accepting forgiveness and a fresh start?

Mark 3:31-34 Jesus’ New Family

Then his mother and his brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent a message asking him to come out to them. There was a crowd sitting round him when the message was brought telling him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you.”

Jesus replied, “And who are really my mother and my brothers?”

And he looked round at the faces of those sitting in a circle about him.

“Look!” he said, “my mother and my brothers are here. Anyone who does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me.”

Jesus’ family still thinks he is plain crazy. They have come to take him home and put him away until he cools down.

What conflicts about human authenticity have arisen in your own biological family?

In response to those who tell him that his family is looking for him, Jesus redefines the family. The biological family is demoted from its often preeminent (even sacred) position. “Who is my family? Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother!”

The “will of God” here does not mean a set of religious rules that someone decided are Divine. The “will of God” points to the ongoing actions of Reality in relation to which Jesus is calling people to be in tune. Doing the will of God means being a realistic person, operating out of human authenticity rather than delusion. And delusion (or estrangement) is pictured in this New Testament period as a vast government, a powerful kingdom enslaving the entire human family, including our own biological parents, brothers, and sisters. The authentic human cannot find his or her support

system in the biological family. We need a new family to support us in our journey toward full realism. Who is our family? Whoever is on the journey toward full realism.

So who is your family by Jesus' definition of "Spirit family"?

It is also interesting that Jesus, the authentic human, does not consider his followers as sons and daughters (as his children), but as brothers and sisters and mothers--that is, as equal adults operating on the same playing field and seeking victories in the same game of life. Mark also avoid using the term "father" which carried the meaning of authority.

What do you think about being a mother, sister or brother in the Jesus' family?

What do you think about seeing yourself as the resurrected body of the New Adam, the New Eve, the restored humanity, the "Coming of the Messiah" dynamic of Earth history?