

UNIT THREE: LEARNING MISSION FROM MARK'S GOSPEL

WELCOME TO A NEW PART OF YOUR JOURNEY



In this unit you begin to look at mission through the eyes of Mark and Mark's community of faith. In Mark's gospel the disciples of Jesus are plunged right into God's mission. In fact, these disciples are invited to participate in Christ's mission even before they come to faith. This observation has led some scholars to conclude that Mark's community also doubted, and that Mark teaches doubters that true belief comes only through participating in God's mission. The disciples also are described as a fearful group of Jesus followers. But when we read Mark's gospel, we discover they have reason to be. Jesus, in Mark, constantly pushes the disciples beyond their comfort zones. Following Jesus, it seems, is risky business. Being engaged in God's mission might even cost someone his or her life.

The church finds itself today surrounded by people of disbelief. Mark challenges us to invite people of little or no faith to come follow Jesus into God's mission. Mark will teach us that regardless of where people are in their faith walk, people who become engaged in God's mission and who are obedient to Christ's call to take up their cross and "come follow me," are considered "disciples" in the Kingdom of God.

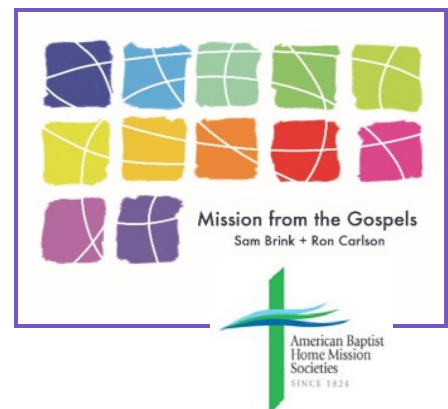
The church today lives in a culture that discourages risk and lifts up false promises of health, wealth and prosperity to all who believe. Mark's gospel manages to push us beyond complacency and out of our comfort zone as we follow Christ in mission. Enjoy learning from Mark, your mission instructor for this month; but also expect to be challenged.

Week One: Opposition Close to Home Everyone loves it when you do a good deed for them, right? In this lesson, we discover that some people will oppose our acts of good deeds.

Week Two: Doing Mission on the Other Side We discover that when we follow Jesus we may be led into areas that are not always comfortable for us. In fact, some can be outright dangerous.

Week Three: Death, Life and Discipleship The way of discipleship is not always about finding ways around our fears but a willingness to accept and move through our fear.

Week Four: Eating and Hanging Out with the "Wrong Kind of People" Like Matthew, Mark challenges us to give serious thought to "who's in and who's out" and what inclusion means for life in the fellowship of faith.



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Week One: Opposition Close to Home

Welcome!



Everyone loves it when you do a good deed for them, right? In this first lesson from Mark's gospel, you will discover that some people will oppose your acts of good deeds. Perhaps, in your mission engagements, you have already made this discovery! If so, then Mark's Gospel may give some reassurance that opposition and pushback in mission should come as no surprise.

Begin class with prayer



Share a prayer of thanksgiving for the insights on mission that you have learned from your reading of Mark. Ask God for new insights into your call to mission as we study Mark's Gospel together.

Investigate



You may have noticed from reading Mark that he does not waste time but has Jesus engaged right from the very beginning in ministry. Mark, of all the gospel writers, highlights the "risky" nature of discipleship. Sometimes the "risky" nature of discipleship is that you encounter opposition to your walk of faith from places and people that you would least expect. Our lesson today looks at an example of that opposition.

Invite someone to volunteer to read the study passage for today: Mark 3:20-35. After hearing the story read, discuss the following questions: (Note: This week we have listed a large number of questions. Your group may decide to divide into smaller study teams to answer some, you may decide to spread this investigation over more than one week, or you may choose to select a limited number of questions to raise in class and then encourage class members to reflect further on the remaining questions during the week.)

1. What surprised or challenged you in this story?
2. What two groups does Mark present as challenging Jesus' ministry?
3. How does the family of Jesus seem to interpret what Jesus is doing?
4. For those in your class who feel comfortable sharing, respond to the following:
 - a. Have you ever faced family opposition to your journey of faith? If you have, how did you face this challenge?
 - b. Have you faced opposition to your journey of faith from others that you closely associate with, who are not part of your family? What are their primary objections or comments to you?
5. How does Jesus define who his true family is? Is this definition helpful or challenging to you?

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6. How do the religious authorities interpret what Jesus is doing?
7. What is the response of the religious authorities to Jesus' acts of healing and deliverance?
8. How does Jesus respond to the accusation of the religious authorities? What do you think his point is? Is this talk helpful to you as you share your faith with others?
9. How do you respond to the talk in Mark's gospel about demons?
10. Mark seems to be teaching his faith community that opposition to your life of faith can come from family members and/or from the religious authorities in your life. What is more challenging for you – to "re-think" the nature of family or to have your "religious" beliefs challenged?
11. What do you think are the implications of this passage as you think about being in mission with Jesus in your community?



Prayerful reflection

Being challenged in your walk of faith is never easy, especially when it comes from people you love and respect. Close this week's class by spending time in prayer for the stories and answers that were shared today. Open yourselves up to the healing presence of Christ.



During the week

If you have not finished reading the Gospel of Mark, do so this week. If you have finished reading Mark, spend some time this week looking at Mark 4:35-5:20 and take note of how you react to this story.

If you haven't finished answering and discussing all of the investigation questions from this week's lesson, get together with someone else from your group and complete your discussion of the questions.

In preparation for next week

Continue to practice the relationship building skill of listening introduced in Unit Two: **Learning Mission from Matthew**. To help you with this practice, do the "60 second quiz" with as many people from your congregation that you can talk to. Explain that you are doing this as part of an assignment for the **Mission from the Gospels** class. Be sure to let people there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Here are the "60 second quiz" questions to ask in preparation for next week's study and discussion:

- Why do you attend church?
- Do your children/parents attend church?
- If you could change one thing about church what would it be?
- What would you say to people who don't attend church if you thought they would listen to you?

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Your goal with this exercise is to *listen* to what people say. Don't argue or try to change their opinion; just listen. After you have talked to several people, write down some of the things you heard people say and be prepared to share your findings at class next week.

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Week Two: Doing Mission on the Other Side, Mark 4:35-5:20



Welcome back!

This week you will investigate some of the challenges and pitfalls of “doing mission on the other side.” Doing mission in our familiar or “safe” environments present challenges enough; but, as Mark will teach us, sometimes when we follow Jesus we may be led into areas that are not always comfortable for us. In fact, some can be outright dangerous!



Begin class with prayer

Take five minutes to hear reports from peoples’ experience with the “60 second quiz.” After taking the time to hear from everyone, share your learnings/challenges/concerns together as an act of prayer.



Let’s investigate

Sometimes when we follow Jesus we are led into situations that make us feel uncomfortable. Sometimes we may even find ourselves called to go to places that ordinarily would be outside our comfort zone. Today’s two-part scripture lesson will help us explore this uneasiness with doing something outside of our comfort zone. We call it “*Doing Mission on the Other Side.*”

A. Invite someone from the class to read part one of the lesson - Mark 4:35-41 and then respond to the following questions:

1. What obstacles and dangers did the disciples face on their way to the “other side”?
2. Do you think the disciples were or were not justified in responding in the way they did to their situation? Explain your answer.
3. What “storms” have you faced in your journey of faith? If you are comfortable with doing so, share the nature of your “storm” and what you felt going through it.
4. Have you ever found yourself thinking or even saying, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing!” If comfortable in doing so, explain your answer.
5. What brought about peace to the disciples in this part of the story? What does your answer say to you about your journey of faith?
6. How have you encountered the “awe of Christ”? If comfortable, share your experience with the group.



Let’s investigate further

Sometimes in mission, just as things calm down, we discover an even greater challenge awaits us on the other side! In the second part of the story, Mark demonstrates that for many people, when Jesus calls us to leave the

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sanctuary and enter into the community of which we are a part of that too can be uncomfortable at times. Sometimes, as we see in this section of the lesson, dealing with situations out of our control can be risky and scary.

B. Invite someone from the class to read Mark 5:1-20 and then respond to the following questions.

1. What, if any, are the “scary parts” of this story for you and why do you find them frightening?
2. For some reason Jesus’ mission disturbs the local population on the other side. What do you think is disturbing to them? Does this surprise you or would you expect this to be their reaction?
3. How do you react to Jesus’ refusal of the man’s request to join Jesus and the disciples and leave with them in the boat? Do you think this part of the lesson prepares you to respond to those who say: “Why are you always doing so much for them when they never come to church?”
4. After thinking and talking about this story, do you think it is primarily the task of the faith community people to get more people into the “boat” or to help send people back into their own community?



Prayerful reflection

Close class today by taking time to thank God for being a source of peace in your lives, especially during very troubling and risky times. If need be, ask for continued courage to go into uncomfortable situations in your community with the good news actions.



During the week conduct the 60 Second Quiz – Part Two: Taking it outside of your faith community

This week you are encouraged to engage in a conversation with your family, friends and/or co-workers. Last week you were given four short questions to ask. (Note: the questions for this week have changed slightly.) As in last week’s assignment, your task is to listen to how the people answer the questions and put together a report for the class next week. If you need to, explain you are doing an exercise for a class. Here are the four questions for this week’s exercise:

1. Why do you attend/not attend church?
2. Do your children/parents attend church?
3. Who is the most spiritual person you know?
- 4a. (If you attend church) What is one thing you would change about church?
- 4b. (If you do not attend church) What would you say to people who go to church if you thought they would listen to you?

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Week Three: Death, Life and Discipleship



Welcome back!

The way of discipleship is not always about finding ways around our fears but being willing to accept and move through our fear. Mark's stories about Jesus' disciples often portray them as a fearful group. As you read through Mark, you probably noticed ample reasons for them to be frightened. Consequently, it is tempting to read this gospel through the lens of "back then" rather than through the lens of mission today, asking Mark the question, "What about us and our call to mission here and now?"



Begin class with prayer

Take five minutes to hear reports from people's experience with the "60 second quiz." After taking the time to hear from everyone in the group; share your learnings/challenges/concerns together as an act of prayer.



Let's investigate

The Bible is full of questions but probably one of the most famous or most remembered questions of all is the question that Jesus asked of his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter is correct in saying that Jesus is the Messiah; but what kind of Messiah was Peter talking about? In the text for today, Mark challenges his faith community and our faith community to ask ourselves who do we say Jesus is and what does our answer mean for us?

Invite someone from the class to read Mark 8:31-9:1 and then discuss the following questions:

1. How you answer the question Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?"
2. Peter does not want Jesus to undergo suffering, which seems like a good thing because what good friend would. But Jesus rebukes Peter for saying what he does. Why do you think Peter was rebuked by Jesus?
3. In what way does Jesus say that the life of a disciple will be like his life? What is Mark trying to teach the faith community by describing discipleship this way? Does the description of the life of a disciple help or disturb you? Explain your answer.
4. Take a few minutes to think about your answer to this question "What does denying yourself, picking up your cross and following Jesus meant to you?" Go around the class and share your answer. Discuss each other's answers? Did you find helpful new insights in the answers of others? If so, share your new insight(s).
5. What is Mark trying to teach his community by describing discipleship this way? What does this teach you and your faith community?

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Let's investigate further

Close your class discussion by sharing how you react to this summary statement? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

The modern church often seems more concerned about comfort, stability and protecting the life of the church. Mark is teaching his faith community and ours, that disciples engaged in mission will face risks and opposition both from within the faith community and from the community at large. True life in Christ is to be found in following Jesus to the other side, even when it seems life threatening.



Prayerful reflection

Close the class by sharing before God those things that bring fear to your lives. Ask for a “peace that passes all understanding” to fall upon each fear and upon the class as you enter into a new week as followers of the one who called you to “take up your cross and follow me.”



During the week: The 60 Second Quiz – Part Three...Taking it Outside of Your Faith Community, Family and Friends

This week, you are encouraged to engage in a conversation with someone who you come into contact with on a regular basis. At the beginning of your study in **Mission from the Gospels**, you were encouraged to begin building a relationship with someone that you did not know. Use the 60 Second Quiz to build on that conversation and relationship. Like last week you have four short questions to ask (note the questions have changed slightly from last week.) As in last week's assignment, your task is to listen to how the people answer the questions and put together a report for your class next week. Here are the four questions for this week's exercise:

1. Do you attend church?
2. Were you raised in a family that belonged to a church?
3. Who is the most spiritual person you know?
- 4a. (If the person attends church) What is the best thing about the church you attend?
- 4b. (If the person does not attend church) What would you say to people who go to church if you thought they would listen to you?

In preparation for next week

Take time to look over the role play for next week's class, “**Reporting Mission on the Other Side.**”

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Week Four: Eating and Hanging Out with the “Wrong Kind of People.”



Welcome back! Like Matthew’s gospel, Mark challenges us to give serious thought to “who’s in and who’s out” and what that means for life in the fellowship of faith. Some people find it deeply disturbing while others find it extremely encouraging that Jesus seemed willing to engage with anyone, regardless of their status in life or the extent of their belief. Today your class will have a chance to talk about this and to experience through a role play how churches might address this issue of “eating and hanging out with the wrong kind of people.”



Begin class with prayer

As we have during the last two weeks, begin class today reporting back about what you learned and experienced through doing the 60 Second Quiz with someone you are starting to build a relationship with. After taking the time to hear from everyone, share what you are learning, what challenges you face and what concerns you have as an act of prayer.



Investigate Mark 2:13-17

Invite someone to read Mark 2:13-17 to the class. After hearing the passage go around the class and share your answers to the following questions:

1. What does it mean for you to follow someone who “eats with tax collectors and sinners?”
2. What does it mean for your faith community to proclaim as their Lord, someone who broke the social norms of the day to “eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Were the actions of inclusion by Jesus only acts of God’s grace or are they actions to be imitated by Jesus’ followers then and now?

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“REPORTING MISSION ON THE OTHER SIDE” A ROLE PLAY

In our reading of Mark, we have been looking at the challenges that we may face in our journey of faith as we learn from stories about Jesus what it means to be on mission with God. In this second part of the class activity, you will “role play” (pretend) that your congregation has to decide on the amount of community engagement it will be involved in. It will be as if you are challenged by Jesus to be with him in mission. Have fun with the role play; for some, it may not feel like a role play at all.

To begin the role play, assign a role to each person from the following two categories:

Mission Team Leader: This person should act enthusiastic about the mission experience he or she is presenting. Their role will include making a presentation to the council/board based on the script in the text-box on the next page. This person will first read the script to others in your group who play the parts of the church council or board members. After reading the script (making their report) the Mission Team Leader will address questions and concerns raised by other class members playing the roles of the church council or board members.

Church Council / Board Members: The rest of the class will play roles of being a church council/board member. Most church boards/councils have people representing property and missions and deacons/elders etc. Each participant should choose a role which she/he will play throughout this exercise. After hearing the presentation by the one who has volunteered to be Mission Team Leader, each council/board member should react to the issue brought to you by the team leader.

As a board/council member:

- What questions do you have about this mission project?
- What excites you about this mission presentation?
- What causes you to have issues with the mission engagement?
- Think of reasons why this mission engagement should be delayed, postponed or discontinued.

You might find it helpful if at the beginning you begin your comments by saying something like: “As a member of the finance committee or mission committee or trustees...” This way everyone knows what role you are playing.

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MISSION TEAM LEADER'S SCRIPT: *The following Mission Report should be read by the person who volunteered roleplay the part of the mission team leader. The following is the mission team leader's presentation to the church council/board:*

REPORTING MISSION ON THE OTHER SIDE!

Thank you for allowing me time to share with the Council. As you may or may not know, after talking about the homeless issue in our community, several of us from the congregation, decided we wanted to do something about it. So we agreed to look in our purses and pockets to see what money we could find to purchase food to take to the homeless on the streets. We found enough money to make sandwiches and a bottle of water for about 25 people. We took the food and went down to the park where a lot of the homeless hang out. We just pulled into the parking lot and opened up the trunk of the car while some of the group went around and said to people in the park, "If you are hungry we have some food over at the car." The food was gone in no time!

After that experience, we agreed that we would return the following week. We encouraged the people to spread the word to their friends. And spread the word they did!

The next week when we went down to the park there were twice as many people. We were excited! But then the police showed up and told us that we could not give out food because the size of the crowd had made other people using the park feel uncomfortable. Some of the neighbors had called to complain. The police also suggested that we were not helping the homeless because we were just feeding into their dependency. So they made the people go away and we were left with a lot of sandwiches.

One of our team members said she knew of a place nearby, a little strip mall where a lot of the homeless hang out. So we got into our cars and headed over there hoping to give out the remaining sandwiches. And we did. We were having a good time getting to know the people when a couple of the store owners came out and said if we did not move they were going to call the police. So we packed up for the evening and left.

As we debriefed this experience, some of our team thought the police were right. They thought we really were feeding into the dependency of the homeless, so they want to stop. But others from the group disagree and are even more committed to the project. They suggest we continue and that we keep our eyes and ears open to the people we serve to see how we might help them get back on their feet. Already we have heard stories about people not being able to find work and about their need to have a place they could list as an address on job applications. Some didn't have a phone number for people to call them on if they were hired. We wondered what we could do about that.

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We decided to go to the mission committee asking for permission to open up the church as a feeding place for people. We also requested to use the church van to pick up people from the park and the strip mall to come and be feed at the church. We thought also that we could use the church phone number or a designated line for those who need to put down a phone number where they could be reached. One of our team volunteered to be in charge of that.

To really help people get back on their feet, we hope to find funds to hire one or two part-time people from the mission field to help with the food distribution.

I guess I am here tonight because the mission committee felt they could not make a decision on such a project. So I'm here to listen to your questions and to ask that the church approve moving our feeding ministry into the church building.

So, what questions or comments do you have?



Role play debrief

In the time you have remaining, discuss the following questions from your experience with the role play.

1. How did you feel during this role play? Was it hard/easy to get into your character?
2. What surprised you as you played out your role? Did you surprise yourself by what you said or what message you were trying to present to the group?
3. As the role play went on, what pushback/opposition did you hear happening – both in the report phase and in the church council discussion?
4. Was it easy or difficult to defend or object to the church hosting the mission engagement that was proposed in the role play? Explain your answer.
5. What has this role play taught you about being engaged in mission?



Prayerful reflection

As you come to the close of this reading of Mark's gospel through the lens of mission, go around the group and share what you have learned from this unit that helps you better understand what God might be doing or calling you to do in your own community. End by thanking God for new learnings and for the witness of Mark's community of faith and the witness of your own community of faith to your host community.

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During the week

Be keenly aware this week of opportunities to get to know people who are often excluded or rejected by faith communities. What opportunities do these personal encounters present for mission in your neighboring community? What opposition or pushback might you encounter as you initiate these relationships?

In preparation for next week

Next week marks the beginning of a new unit in **Mission from the Gospels** (Unit 4: **Learning Mission from Luke's Gospel**). Find time this week to read through the Gospel of Luke (in one or two settings if possible). If you have time, read the Acts of the Apostles also, keeping in mind that Luke also authored the Acts of the Apostles. As you read, begin to see the mission implications of Luke's gospel for you and your faith community. Remember to keep reading the gospels through the lens of mission.

