

We are now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Mark's gospel. First half dealt with the mystery of Jesus and asked the question "Who is Jesus?" (Readers knew from the prologue). In 8:29b Peter answers: "You are the Messiah", but in 8:30 the suggestion emerges that this may not be the whole truth. The second half of the story shows that Jesus is the Messiah who will be revealed as the Son of Man on the cross, a suffering and vindicated Son of Man (8:31); 9:31; 10:32-33; 13:26; 14:61-62; 15:39). In 15:39 a Roman centurion (pagan) confesses: "Truly this man was God's Son!" The suffering Christ is truly the Son of God. The mystery Has come to an end. Mark 8:31- 15:47 can be titled "the suffering and vindicated Son of Man: Christ and Son of God." Running through the whole section will also be the theme of discipleship.

As the first half of the gospel, after the Prologue, was subdivided in three parts (1:14-3:6 Galilean Ministry starts; 3:7-6:6b Jesus and his new family; 6:7- 8:30 Jesus and his disciples) so too there will be subdivisions across 8:31-15:47.

**1]** (8:31-10:52) Jesus and the disciples journey to Jerusalem. Jesus journey to Jerusalem focuses strongly on his teaching of his oncoming death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34) and his instruction of increasingly recalcitrant disciples. **2]** (11:1-13:37) Jesus, the Messiah in Jerusalem – I have divided this in two parts treating chapter 13 separately. **3]** (14:1-15:47) Jesus' passion and death.

The epilogue (16:1-8) follows.

Mark designed the first half of the gospel asking the question, "Who is Jesus?" and the second half designed to respond: "the suffering and vindicated Son of Man, the Christ, and Son of God." However, these two halves of the plot overlap. One flows into the other, looks back to issues already mentioned, and hints at themes yet to come.

E.g. **Blindness:** Theme of blindness emerged in 8:22-26 in the strange story of a blind man at Bethsaida, whose sight was restored in stages. This theme will be resumed in 10:46-52 where the story of blind Bartimaeus coming to sight is reported. Between these two miracle stories (like a Markan sandwich), where blind men are cured, Jesus speaks of the oncoming death and resurrection of the Son of Man (see 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34), an issue hidden behind the events reported in the first half of the gospel in 1:14-8:30. (See 3:6; 7:14-29; 8:11-15). After each of the passion predictions, Jesus instructs increasingly obtuse disciples, who will not or cannot understand what it means to follow him (see 8:32-33; 9:33-37; 10:36-45). An earlier accusation of blindness also comes into play. After the second multiplication of the loaves and fishes (8:1-9) Jesus asks his dull disciples: "Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" (8:18)

## Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in

return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." <sup>9</sup> <sup>1</sup> And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

*Mark immediately introduces the first passion prediction "and he began....and he said this plainly (vv. 31-32a). For the first time in the gospel Jesus speaks clearly of who he is, and he describes the destiny of the Son of Man: suffering, rejection, killed, risen. In a deliberate contrast to 8:30 where the disciples were severely warned against speaking of Jesus as "the Christ", Jesus openly proclaims his message of the Son of Man for the first time. He is not a powerful, royal Messiah. Such an understanding of Jesus is not to be spread abroad. His Messiahship is to be found in his future as the Son of Man and will involve rejection, suffering, death and resurrection after three days. For the remainder of the gospel the disciples will struggle to hold these two truths together. This is the first appearance of the expression "the Son of Man" since 2:10 and 2:28.*

*Vv. 32-33 Peter, again in the name of the disciples, vigorously opposes Jesus' revelation. Peter was ready to confess that Jesus was the Messiah (v.29), but talk of suffering, rejection, death and resurrection was not part of his vision. "Messiah" and "suffering" were incompatible. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, attempting to impose his vision of what the Messiah should be like. Jesus reaction does not focus only on Peter but on all the disciples. Jesus rebukes Peter addressing him as Satan. Jesus and his disciples are "on the way" but Peter is blocking that way, a stumbling block, trying to hold Jesus back, and rejecting his acceptance of God's plan. Peter and the disciples are told "get behind me" and not block his path to Jerusalem with their all too human understanding of Messiahship.*

*8:34-9:1 This section is addressed to anyone who wants to be a follower of Jesus. Disciples are called to renounce themselves, take up their cross, lose their life for Jesus and the gospel, and never to be ashamed of Jesus and his words. One can have all the glory of this world, but lose one's life, for which there is no substitute (what can they give in return for their life v.37). Those who reject this way – that is, those who are captured by the ways of this world, the values of this "adulterous and sinful generation," – find Jesus, his words, and his fate "shameful" – will themselves be a source of shame to the Son of Man when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (v.38).*

*The final statement in 9:1 has long caused difficulty, is not easy to understand, and there are different interpretations.... I give here part of Francis J Moloney's commentary p 177. 'The future of Jesus, Messiah and Son of Man, is fundamental to the future of the disciple who takes up the cross, lays down his life, and is not ashamed of Jesus...Jesus has told his disciples that he will be slain, "and after three days rise again" (v.31). This is what the "some who are standing here" will experience. The crucified yet risen Christ will be the guarantee of the truth of Jesus' teaching. The Son of Man will be slain, but his loss of self kin death will be vindicated in resurrection. There are some standing there hearing Jesus' words who will experience the apparent failure of the crucifixion, overcome by God's power in the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus will be the kingdom of God coming in power. This will be true sight: an acceptance of a discipleship which responds to the teaching of Jesus in 8:34-38 (cross, loss of self, and ultimate vindication). Empowered by the presence of the risen Jesus, the kingdom of God come in power. As the storyteller looks back upon the world within the text, he singles out this privilege for "some who are standing here" in the time of the narrative. However long past it may have been, the Markan community and its Gospel exist because of the experience of some who were standing there. They experienced the transformation of suffering into power, and their witness lies behind the Markan narrative.*

## The Transfiguration

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one<sup>Ⓜ</sup> on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved;<sup>Ⓜ</sup> listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

This is the second of three scenes in which Jesus is declared to be God's Son. The first occurred after his baptism (Prologue 1:11 where the divine voice spoke to Jesus alone "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.") The third will be on the lips of the Roman centurion immediately after his death (15:39). Each of these three moments of revelation follows a description or an allusion to Jesus' obedient entrance at depth into the human situation alienated from God. The first (1:11) follows his submission to baptism at the hands of John along with a mass of repentant Israelites. The transfiguration (6 \days later) follows his first announcement that he is to suffer and die (8:31). The third and final declaration is a reaction to his death. Which has just occurred. It is as the One who has obediently made a costly entrance into the depths of the human condition that Jesus is revealed as Messiah and Son of God.

*The Transfiguration is a revelation of Jesus' full identity made to Peter, James and John, the inner group of disciples who were with him in the raising of Jairus, the synagogue official's daughter (5:37) and they will be with him later in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:33).*

**The appearance of Elijah and Moses.** Traditionally these two figures have been explained as representatives of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). But the figures are introduced in reversed order! Two points to note: 1] both had experienced theophanies (manifestations of God) on a mountain and 2] both were celebrated in Jewish tradition as having been transported into heaven. This is clear for Elijah in 2Kgs 3:9-12. And even though Moses death is recorded, the place of his burial is unknown and there was a tradition of his exaltation to heavenly glory. This scene is an anticipation of Jesus glorification that must take place by means of his suffering, death and resurrection into glory (see 8:31). Elijah is mentioned first because he has been so important in the surrounding narrative. In 8:28 the disciples reported that some people regarded Jesus as Elijah, and in the verses that follow the Transfiguration it is again Elijah who figures in the discussion.

*But again, the disciples fail. Let's build three dwellings (booths, tents). Peter calls Jesus "Rabbi" (teacher) and wants to hold on to the experience in perpetuity. He has forgotten Jesus' words on his destiny as Son of Man (8:31) and his invitation to all who would be his disciples to share in that destiny (8:34-9:1). Then wrapped in a cloud comes a voice which repeats for the disciples what had previously been made known only to the reader in the Prologue "This is my beloved son" (9:7b; see 1:11). And they are instructed: "Listen to him" (v.7b). However troublesome the words of Jesus have become (suffering, rejection, death, resurrection), and however difficult his demands will become as he leads them to Jerusalem, the disciples must listen to him, Christ (8:29), Son of Man (8:31), and Son of God (9:7)...will they?*

## The Coming of Elijah

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. <sup>11</sup> Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" <sup>12</sup> He said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?" <sup>13</sup> But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."

*"Say nothing until..." The glory they have witnessed is not to be divorced from the Passion and death that lies before him.*

*Elijah has already come in the shape of John the Baptist*

## The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit

<sup>14</sup> When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. <sup>16</sup> He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" <sup>17</sup> Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; <sup>18</sup> and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." <sup>19</sup> He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." <sup>20</sup> And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup> It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" <sup>26</sup> After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. <sup>28</sup> When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>29</sup> He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

*The disciples and the scribes are arguing as Jesus, Peter, James and John approach. The argument sets the scene for Jesus to ask what was being discussed. Someone describes the boy's ailment which resembles what modern society calls epilepsy, but he regards it as possession by a dumb spirit. In the absence of Jesus, he asked the disciples to cast it out but they were unable. The reference to the disciples' inability to effect a cure leads to Jesus harsh words: "you faithless generation, how much longer must I be with you?" (v.19). It is the disciples' lack of faith that frustrates and leads Jesus to wonder how much more he must spend with their increasing failure. And as we continue in the narrative and see their failure increase one might expect Jesus to say "enough is enough" but this is never the case. Jesus called the twelve to be "with him" (3:14-15) sharing his life and ministry. Jesus may be frustrated, but never abandons his disciples – worth remembering in 2021 and always! Our sympathy comes to a peak as the father, grappling with Jesus' demand for faith and recognising his lack of faith, cries out in anguish: "I believe, help my unbelief/ help my lack of faith". He has turned*

to Jesus for help in his nothingness. The father's faith may be small but he is at least looking for help in the right direction.

*In the house asking Jesus why they were unable to cast out the demon. We might have expected, in view of its significance in the story so far, the necessity of faith, but Jesus speaks of prayer. It is not the disciples who cast out demons but God.*

### **Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

<sup>30</sup> They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

### **Who Is the Greatest?**

<sup>33</sup> Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" <sup>34</sup> But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup> Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

**Mark 9:30-37 is the Sunday gospel for week 25B.** In 'homily' notes sent out I have used the passage below that I find very meaningful

*Jesus quietly passes through Galilee – instructing his disciples. He tells them he will be given up, killed and will rise after three days.*

*"The disciples are afraid to ask him about it. Half knowing what he is saying, in an understandable human way they shrink from full knowledge of an unpalatable truth. They prefer to cling to the exciting prospect for their future that being close associates of the Messiah (conventionally understood) would seem to entail.*

*An aspect of this has, in fact, been the subject of an argument they have been having "on the way." They have been arguing about which of them is the greatest – and so first in line to enjoy a leading role in the coming messianic kingdom. Nothing could run more counter to what Jesus has been attempting to teach them. Hence their guilty, half-knowing silence when Jesus questions them in the house at Capernaum.*

*In response Jesus sits down (the posture of teaching), summons the twelve –the leading group - and lays down the principle that must govern the exercise of leadership in his messianic community: the one who would be first must be last of all and servant (diakonos) of all. He dramatizes the lesson by taking a child from the house and setting it in front of them. He wraps his arms around the child and then makes an extraordinary statement of self-identification: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me but the One who sent me."*

*To grasp the full force of this action on Jesus 'part we have to put aside the idealisation of childhood that arose in the nineteenth century. In the ancient world children were precious, no doubt, to their parents but they had no social status or value whatever; until adulthood they were nobodies. For someone outside the family the "welcome" a child would be to turn prevailing values and social mores upside down; it would require putting aside all one's own ideas of self-importance and adult status to simply meet the child as an equal, as "child" to child. That, says Jesus, is what the disciples must*

*“practice.” In so doing, they will be welcoming him, and not only him but the Father who stands behind his entire life and mission, which is not one of dominance and being served but one of service destined to culminate in the supreme “service” (diakonia) of giving his life as a ransom for many (10:45).*

*It is hard to exaggerate the significance of this gesture of divine identification with child. Not only does it challenge the disciples’ notion of Messiahship, it goes to the heart of their, and our, understanding of God. Is God to be thought of as a kind of extra-terrestrial Ruler to whom nothing but service and fear is due? Or is the God revealed by Jesus a God whose primary gesture towards human beings is that of One who serves, One who comes amongst us in the guise of a child? Jesus’ gesture of hugging the child in front of all shows more powerfully than any words could express the preciousness of each child and every human life in the sight of God, no matter how small, how insignificant we are. We are all – in our “littleness” rather than our achievement – hugged by God in this moment.*

*The lesson, the challenge to worldly values and estimation, that the disciples found so difficult, confronts the church in every age. After the early centuries of persecution, at the time of Constantine (early fourth century c.e.) the church emerged from the catacombs to take on many of the trappings and roles of the Roman officials. We are now witnessing the end of that “Constantinian church” in which leaders were accorded honours and symbols of rank more reflective of worldly power than the values of Jesus, and where the institution itself was built into the fabric of society. The pain that goes along with the loss of status and honour is perhaps akin to that experienced by the disciples of Jesus as they struggled both to hear and to resist what he was saying. Like them, we are all on the way to Jerusalem with Jesus.”*

**Brendan Byrne A Costly Freedom. The Disciples instructed on the “Way”: 9:30-10:52 Pp151-153**

### **Another Exorcist**

**38** John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone<sup>□</sup> casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” **39** But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **40** Whoever is not against us is for us. **41** For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

*John, one of the privileged three, gives arrogant witness to the disciples’ ongoing failure. As Peter fails after the first passion prediction (8:32), John fails after the second. The disciples saw someone cast out demons in the name of Jesus and they forbade him because he was not following **them**. As if the mark of discipleship was to be a follower of the Twelve. The disciples are not receptive to anyone who does not meet their criterion. Instead of the approval they probably expected for this action what they receive from Jesus is a mild rebuke (v.39).*

*The principle of Jesus is clear: whoever does things in the name of Jesus must be allowed to proceed. What counts are acts of service, not whether one is inside or outside the community but whether one has performed the service expected of the community (vv.40-41)*

*Disciples are invited to look away from their own sense of distinctiveness and privilege and be prepared to find and rejoice in goodness wherever it exists. This is not to take away from the importance of being disciples of Jesus. So much for goodness outside the community. Vv 42-50 take up the issue of evil that may exist within the community.*

## Temptations to Sin

<sup>42</sup> "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup> "For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

*Mark uses a collection of lengthy originally independent sayings here. Basically, Jesus is warning about leading the little ones, the vulnerable, the fragile, into sin. Some of the sections here not easy to link together but the general message is clear: "Disciples are to be the least of all and the servants of all, like children themselves, receptive to the least of all (vv.35-37), never judging anyone who works in the name of Jesus (vv.38-31), never endangering the faith of even the most fragile (vv.42-50). They are to be at peace with one another in the kingdom (v.50). Disciples open to this teaching receive Jesus and the one who sent him (vv.35-37)." Moloney, Mark p 192.*

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*8:22-10:52 deals almost exclusively with Jesus' presence with his disciples. There are two exceptions 10:1-9 he debates with the Pharisees over divorce and then speaks to the disciples "in the house" and then after a passage where children are brought to Jesus, Jesus offers a wealthy man the possibility of eternal life and subsequently speaks to his disciples. The storyteller has a purpose for taking these three elements from his traditions and using them in his account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem with the disciples. Thus far he has called his disciples to the cross 8:34-9:1, to service and receptivity (9:35-50). These instructions have been at the level of principle, in discussions between Jesus and his disciples. Before moving into the third and final passion prediction (10:32-34), Jesus will speak of marriage and wealth. The disciples, attempting to live God's designs in their affective and sexual lives, and in the administration of their possessions, draw principle into everyday life. In marriage and in the administration of possessions, the call of the cross, service and receptivity are most at risk. Mark is concerned with the practice rather than the theory of discipleship.*

## Teaching about Divorce

**10** He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.

<sup>2</sup> Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

<sup>10</sup> Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup> He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup> and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

*The Pharisees ask Jesus for a judgement on whether divorce should be allowed. Note – their question concerning divorce only touches the rights of man to divorced his wife. Jesus concedes that Moses allowed the certificate of divorce that allowed a man to send a woman away from his home. However, Jesus insists that this was not God's original plan for women and men. Jesus quotes Genesis describing God's creation of man and woman and God's subsequent gift of man to woman and woman to man so that they might become one flesh (vv.7-8a). Two separate human being have now been joined together in a loving and sexual union by God's design. In Jesus' restoration of God's original plan there should be no divorce, granted by Moses because of the hardness of hearts of Israelites. The union between a man and a woman was established by God and no man has the authority to tear that union apart. Jesus further instructs his disciples back in the house where he indicates that divorce followed by remarriage leads to an infringement of the commandment against adultery. In the Jewish understanding a wife was considered the property of her husband and he could not, strictly speaking, be guilty of adultery against her. The wife could commit adultery against her husband and he against another man (by taking his wife). Against this bias in favour of the man Jesus raises the dignity of the woman by stating that in divorcing and re-marrying he commits adultery against her (v.11). His second ruling (v.12) also raises women's social status, albeit in the negative case, by envisaging a situation in which a woman might initiate a divorce – something not allowed in the Jewish Law but allowed in the Roman milieu of the gospel.*

**Byrne p 159:** "The overall instruction Jesus is recorded as giving here is so counter-cultural, not only in respect to its original setting but also to society today, that it is understandably heard more in terms of what it prohibits (divorce) than what it commands. But it is unfortunate if the negative note on which it ends (vv.11-12) leads to a neglect of the positive and, in terms of his own society, innovative character of Jesus' teaching on marriage, in which the union of two in "one flesh" is simply the most intimate expression of a commitment, companionship and intimacy embracing the totality of life. At the same time it is an undeniable fact that most congregations who hear the Gospel today will include a considerable proportion of people in second marriages or people affected by family members in that situation. In many if not most cases that situation will have come about through circumstances beyond their control or from which they cannot now responsibly free themselves. To simply read out the rulings of Jesus in the Gospel without comment or nuance would be to turn the Gospel into law and only add to a burden of guilt that already may be oppressive."

1) It does seem clear that Jesus did rule out divorce and remarriage for the community he was forming. 2) Life expectancy then was half what it is in Western society today. 3) Already in Matthew's gospel we see in the recordings of Jesus' rulings on divorce (5:32; 19:9) some movement towards accommodation to new situations in which believers found themselves. See also St Paul 1 Cor 7:10-16). 4) "Moreover, the reality is that people make mistakes and relationships fail- something that longer lifespan and the high premium currently placed on personal freedom and development make so prevalent. While remaining faithful to the ideal taught by Jesus in the name of the Kingdom, the church has to find a way to help people grow through failure, to find in it an experience of grace and deepened knowledge of God" (See Byrne 159-160) (Recommended for a longer read: Francis J Moloney A Body Broken for a broken people: Divorce, Remarriage and the Eucharist. All relevant but see pages 205-254; Francis J. Moloney Eucharist as celebration of Forgiveness pp 93-99 "A contemporary dilemma." The Joy of Love/ Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis – all... but at least ch.8 accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness)

### Jesus Blesses Little Children

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

*The disciples seem to have forgotten that not long earlier (9:36-37) Jesus told them that in welcoming children, they were welcoming him. Children cannot earn, or perform any useful work. What they receive comes to them as pure gift. They are models for us on how to receive the kingdom of God - coming to us, freely and without measure as unmerited gift, on condition that we have a change of heart (repent) and believe the good news (1:15) of God's love for us – receiving it like little children.*

### The Rich Man

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" <sup>20</sup> He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money<sup>ἵνα</sup> to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is<sup>ἵνα</sup> to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another,<sup>ἵνα</sup> "Then who can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

*Jesus has been teaching his disciples on the need to receive the gift of the kingdom. This man asks the wrong question: "What must I do"? The man presumes there is something he must do to gain eternal life/ entry into Kingdom of God. Jesus gives him a selection of the 10 commandments which the man says he has kept. He is looking for more. He asks Jesus advice on what he must do to attain eternal life. His problem lies in his belief that he can attain this "something more" by his own efforts." Jesus calls him to discipleship. He must let go of his security (sell what you have and give to the poor) and reduced to a situation of need and dependence he will have the opportunity to be receptive to the action of God in his life. Let go, and let God. Too much for him and he departs.*

*Jesus follows up on the discussion with his disciples commenting on the difficulty people with many possessions will have entering the kingdom of God. His disciples cannot accept this teaching. In their world riches were a sign of God's blessing, and it was the rich who determined everything from religion*

*to politics and all in between. Jesus increases their amazement by comparing the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom to a camel passing through the eye of a needle. It is impossible, and the disciples understood Jesus correctly. Who then can be saved, they asked? No one enters the kingdom of God by their own efforts. We are saved. It is not something that human beings are able to do by virtue of their possessions, authority, strength or wisdom. The practical examples of marriage (10:1-12) and possessions (vv.17-22) teach us that God's ways are not our ways. All human efforts trying to get into the kingdom of God is like trying to get a camel through the eye of a needle. It is impossible. If human resources alone are looked to, the impossibility stands. But God sees to it that even the impossible becomes possible – all things are possible to God. What is asked of them is receptivity to the countercultural ways of God made evident in the person and teaching of Jesus.*

*Peter then points out that they have left all things and followed Jesus. Jesus lists all that the members of his community have left behind for his sake and for the sake of the Gospel, and then offers a list of what they will receive back a hundredfold in this present age and in the age to come "eternal life." The lists are identical apart from one item: among the family members in the second list, "father" does not appear. The members of Jesus' new family share with him one "Father": God. "Persecutions" also added in the second list. Some of Mark's readers would have known persecution, and it must be accepted as part of "this time" as disciples of Christ.*

### **A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection – final prediction of the passion.**

<sup>32</sup> They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, <sup>33</sup> saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; <sup>34</sup> they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

### **The Request of James and John**

<sup>35</sup> James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup> But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" <sup>39</sup> They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

<sup>41</sup> When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

*They are on way to Jerusalem, Jesus ahead, they were in a daze, apprehensive. Jesus takes 12 aside and tells them again what is going to happen. It is Mark's most detailed prediction of the*

passion and reads like a summary of 14:1-16:8. His prediction of what would be done to him could not be clearer (vv.33-34). James, John and Peter have been the privileged ones, the inner three, (Jairus, Transfiguration- "listen to him"). Their bold request shows they haven't listened. They have recognised him as Messiah/Christ, but completely fail to appreciate, or choose to ignore that this path to messianic glory will run through suffering, death and resurrection in Jerusalem. James and John, rejecting all suggestions that they be receptive to what God might have in store demand that Jesus do what they ask of him (v.35). There is no recognition of what will happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. Jesus does not abandon James and John, but instructs them. The other 10, who have heard the passion prediction and the conversation between James, John and Jesus, feel indignant at seeing the two try to bag the two main positions for themselves. Jesus gathers them and established service as the feature of Christian discipleship. The so-called rulers of the nations, lord it over their subjects and exploit their power to their own advantage. This is not to happen in his community. They must think of themselves as servants using their powers and capacities for the benefit of others. And Jesus leads the way by example: **"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."** His ministry from the start has been marked with great power and authority but only used to set people free and for reclaiming people for the Kingdom. He has told them he will die, now he gives reason, as a price paid to liberate people.

### **The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus**

<sup>46</sup> They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>48</sup> Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>49</sup> Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." <sup>50</sup> So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." <sup>52</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

#### **A blind man becomes a disciple 10:46-52**

Jesus is on the final stage of his journey to Jerusalem during which his main task was instructing his disciples on the true nature of his messianic mission: that his path to messianic glory would run through suffering, death and resurrection accomplished in Jerusalem. His disciples resist or fail to grasp the meaning of what Jesus is telling them. As they are leaving Jericho on the final 20 km of the journey to Jerusalem blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the side of the road, is introduced into the narrative. He is not only blind, but a beggar. In worldly terms he is a nobody. On hearing that Jesus of Nazareth (as Jesus was known) was passing Bartimaeus cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy of me." Bartimaeus believes that as "Son of David," Jesus of Nazareth can bring relief to his sufferings and nothingness. His being rebuked by those around him does not stop Bartimaeus. He continues to cry out his profession of faith all the louder. Jesus stops on his journey and commands "call him here." Jesus asks Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" It is the same question Jesus had asked James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who had asked for positions of honour and power when Jesus came to the glory of his messianic power in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus asks: "Master, that I may see again." "Go, your faith has made you well," answered Jesus. Bartimaeus unconditional faith in Jesus as "Son of David" able to give him full sight is the reason for the miracle. Bartimaeus is now free to go where he likes not limited to sit by the side of the road begging. He chooses to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

*Earlier in the narrative, (8:22-26) we met the blind man who was cured in stages and we end this section with the cure of Bartimaeus who follows Jesus. In between (8:27-10:45) we saw the limited, partial sight of the disciples who rightly saw Jesus as the Messiah but continued in spite of continuous instruction to grasp, accept or understand what kind of Messiah Jesus was called to be. In this section the disciples never progressed from partial sight. Bartimaeus received the gift of full sight that had eluded Jesus' disciples.*

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*The two miracles of blindness positioned at beginning and end of journey (like bookends, or resembling the Markan sandwich) have symbolic role. In between Jesus tries to overcome the blindness of his disciples. Bartimaeus cure and follows Jesus along the way on his journey to Jerusalem. The blind beggar becomes a model of discipleship and faith.*