

Devotions for Oct. 3 -9, 2011

Monday, October 3, 2011: *Purpose* Daily reading: John 20:30-31

Luke discloses the purpose of his writing at the beginning of his Gospel, telling us that he is gathering, sorting, and ordering stories of Jesus so that Christians might be encouraged in their faith. John, however, waits until the end, admitting there is more he could have said, but didn't. Why? Because John's intent is both persuasive (wanting us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah) and evangelical (so that believing, we might have life in Jesus' name). John is after something: us and our faith! We hear God's story proclaimed so that we might believe it, and have life in Jesus. What a great way to begin this adventure into the Bible! Ask God to guide you through the words of Scripture this week.

Tuesday, October 4, 2011: *Disclosure* Daily reading: John 20:30-31 again

The placement of this disclosure, after the episode between the risen Jesus and Thomas, is no accident. Jesus encounters a variety of people throughout John, and makes claims through his words and deeds about who he is. Each scene invites us to imagine a response. Perhaps we're like Nicodemus: curious, but not ready to commit. Or the woman at the well: we can't believe we've met the Messiah, and can't wait to tell others. Or we're like the man born blind: wanting to know who restored our sight. Or Pilate: seeking to avoid a decision about Jesus. Or Peter: wanting to be faithful, yet denying the Lord. John offers all of these possibilities, but concludes with Thomas, one who is called to faith even though he has not yet seen Jesus. We imagine John saying to us: "This is what I hope for you – that you, too, will believe even without seeing, and in this way be blessed." Ask God to help you see yourself in the pages of God's story.

Wednesday, October 5, 2011: *Ending* Daily reading: Mark 16:1-8

Most scholars believe that Mark's story ends here, at verse 8a, with the women running away from the empty tomb silent and afraid. It's not a very good ending! No wonder faithful monks of later generations felt it was necessary to amend it not once (verse 8b), but twice (verses 9-20)! This is understandable, as there are two major "problems" with Mark's ending. First, Jesus doesn't show up, and that's embarrassing for a resurrection story. Second, the women fail. They've been given a clear indicator of good news – the classic "Do not be afraid" – and told that God has raised Jesus from the dead. They were also given very simple instructions – to go and tell his disciples – yet they fail. What gives? We'll soon discover that Mark has a greater purpose in writing this story. Ask God to help you understand the writer's intentions more deeply this week.

Thursday, October 6, 2011: *Addition* Daily reading: Mark 16:9 to the end of the writing

The Gospel of Mark screeches to a halt at verse 8. There you are: a resurrection scene without Jesus that ends in failure. It's easy to understand how a well-intentioned monk, dismayed by this ending, thinks, "I can fix that!" While this short, sweet ending sounds like nothing else in Mark, it at least brings things to a better end: "And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterwards Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." Isn't that better? Of course, a later monk doesn't think it goes far enough, and adds a longer ending with additional scenes that look and feel like the other Gospels. He even throws in a little snake charming for good measure! The ending of Mark is one of the most curious episodes in all of Scripture. Ask God to guide you into deeper understand of God's story this week.

Friday, October 7, 2011: *Two-Part Pattern* Daily reading: Mark 8:31-33; Mark 9:30-32; Mark 10:32-34

This text perpetuates a two-part pattern that occurs many times in Mark. Part one: those who should know about Jesus don't. The disciples have been told by Jesus three separate times that he will go to Jerusalem, die, and be raised again on the third day, yet they do not expect it. Time and again, the disciples show that they do not understand who Jesus is or what he's about. Part two: some characters do recognize who Jesus is, but they can't be counted on for faithful witness. When Jesus confronts the possessed man in Gerasene, the demons recognize who Jesus is (5:7), but you can't count on a demon for testimony! The centurion who crucifies Jesus also recognizes who he is; but you can't count on a Roman soldier for a faithful witness, either. Do you understand who Jesus is, and what he's about? Ask God to help you understand Jesus and his purpose.

Saturday, October 8, 2011: *You* Daily reading: Mark 16:1-8 again

So it would appear we're stuck. But there is one more person who knows who Jesus is – who has seen his miracles, heard his sermons, listened to his predictions and watched them come true, and heard the testimony of the messenger at the empty tomb proclaiming that Jesus has been raised from death. That is you, the reader. It's us. Mark leaves the story in failure in order to put the burden of proclamation squarely on our shoulders. Mark creates an open ending because he wants to enlist each of us to pick up where the disciples left off, inviting us to share the news of Jesus' resurrection with any and all who will listen. Can you envision yourself as the one who will continue writing this story today, living your life as a proclamation of Jesus' resurrection? Ask God for help living into this "ending."

Sunday, October 9, 2011: *Story* Daily reading: Mark 1:1-8

Everyone likes a good story. Have you ever imagined going to Hogwarts along with Harry Potter? Have you ever been drawn into a story like *Lost* or *Mad Men*? Why? You can imagine playing a role in those stories. Mark invites us to imagine that we have a role to play in the story, and that the story he tells is only the beginning of what God is up to. Mark wants everyone to feel invited – not just by him but by God! – to participate in the ongoing story of God that begins with Genesis and ends only at the very end with Revelation. We all live somewhere between Acts and Revelation. This is our story. Let's claim it, enter into it, and continue telling it! Ask God to help you claim this story as your own, and enter into it.