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The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

June 3, 10, 17, 24, and July 1

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June 3, The Second Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 2:23-3:6

Most of the pericope notes assigned for use in Lent during the present church year are from John. All passages assigned for use during the rest of the present church year are from Mark and John. What follows is a survey of the Marcan narrative that precedes 4:26-34.

Mark 1:1: Good news! The Messianic Age has broken in with Jesus the Messiah!

Mark 1:2: Jesus will eventually visit the Temple to observe what is taking place within its walls. Note here the second part of Malachi 3:1. Although Mark quotes the first part of Malachi 3:1, he expects his readers to recall the second part of the verse (3:1b—a practice referred to as *remez*).

Mark 1:3: Jesus has come to complete the rescue (*exodus*) of God's people from the powers of Satan, sin, and death—powers embedded in the Roman imperial system.

Mark 1:4–8: Many Jews from Judea and Jerusalem come to John the Baptist to be baptized.

Mark 1:9–11: When John baptizes Jesus, a heavenly voice declares Jesus to be *Servant* and *King*.

Mark 1:12–13: Satan confronts Jesus in the wilderness. The battle between the two continues until Jesus finally conquers Satan in the crucifixion and resurrection events. Through Jesus' ministry, things are being put right in the world of nature (animals do not harm Jesus) and the heavenly realm (the angels minister to Jesus).

Mark 1:14–15: Jesus proclaims the Good News, the central truth of His ministry: *The Kingdom of God has broken in with Jesus!*

Mark 1:16–20: On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus chooses four disciples and calls them to follow Him.

Mark 1:21–28: Jesus begins His ministry to the *Jewish people* by casting a demon out of a man in a synagogue on a Sabbath. **Note:** He will begin His ministry among the *Gentiles* by casting demons out of a man in the region of the Decapolis (5:1-20).

Mark 1:29–31: Jesus heals the mother of Simon Peter on a Sabbath.

Mark 1:32–34: When the Sabbath ends, He heals many people of a variety of diseases and casts out many demons.

Mark 1:35–39: Jesus prays alone, during the night, and then travels around Galilee preaching in synagogues and casting out demons.

Mark 1:40–45: Jesus heals a man afflicted with leprosy and touches this “unclean outcast” prior to healing Him.

Mark 2:1–12: Jesus heals a paralyzed man. However, He first declares the man forgiven of his sins—a statement that the “sin forgiveness system” now resides in *Jesus*, not the Jerusalem Temple. The scribes present accuse Jesus of blasphemy, a charge that the Jerusalem political and religious leaders will eventually hurl at Him (14:63).

Mark 2:14: Jesus calls a fifth disciple to follow Him—this time, Levi (possibly Matthew), a despised tax collector who has been collaborating with the Romans.

Mark 2:15–22: Jesus eats with those whom the scribes of the Pharisees despise.

Mark 2:23–3:6: Jesus breaks two Sabbaths in a row. Jewish leaders taught that if all Jews kept two Sabbaths in a row, the Messiah would come. The Pharisees and Herodians now discuss how they might put Jesus to death!

June 10, The Third Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 3:20–35

Most of the pericope notes assigned for use in Lent during the present church year are from John. All passages assigned for use during the rest of the present church year are from Mark and John. What follows is a survey of the Marcan narrative that precedes 4:26–34.

Mark 3:7–12: Multitudes come to hear what Jesus has to say. It is possible that some of them are Gentiles—from Syrophenicia and the Transjordan.

Mark 3:13–19: Jesus now has *twelve* disciples (including Judas), and sends them out to proclaim His message and cast out demons. Note that He meets with the disciples on a mountain. The twelve and “those about Him” are insiders; they have the key to the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Mark 3:19b–35: Jesus now goes “home” to either Nazareth or a house in the vicinity of Capernaum. Scribes from Jerusalem accuse Him of being in league with the ruler of the demons. Members of His family (perhaps Mary and some of His brothers) appear on the scene and seek to restrain Him. Perhaps they were concerned about His safety (amidst the intense emotions emerging around Him), and the

charges of insanity directed at Him. Jesus responds by stating that His family bonds have to do with discipleship, not genetics! Those who know and do the will of God are His brother, sister, and mother.

June 17, The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 4:26–34

Most of the pericopes assigned for use in Lent during the present Church Year are from John. All passages assigned for use during the rest of the present Church Year are from Mark and John. What follows is a survey of the Marcan narrative that precedes 4:26–34.

Mark 4:1–25: Jesus teaches—using parables (including that of the sower).

In Mark's first four chapters, Jesus travels across Galilee, through areas outside of towns, and to the coast of the Sea of Galilee. The Kingdom of God is not to be linked to any specific place in the world—be it a house, a town, a synagogue, or the fields—and it is not an otherworldly entity. The Kingdom of God is people—and it has arrived wherever people are liberated from the forces of evil and gathered as forgiven brothers and sisters into Jesus' servant-family.

4:26–29: Only Mark includes this brief kingdom parable. Its message is that, in and through Jesus, the seeds of the Kingdom of God have been sown, and the Kingdom's growth is inevitable.

V. 26: The farmer sows during the planting season, and then goes about his daily business.

V. 27: Nature ushers forth the sprouting and growing without consulting the farmer.

V. 28: Within the forces of nature (God's hands, not human hands) lie the powers of the sprouting and maturing process.

V. 29: When the maturing process is complete, the farmer harvests the crop. Although he plants and reaps, God alone is the one who brings to pass the sprouting and growth process.

Does Jesus mean that the efforts of man are as nothing compared with the plan of God? Does He mean that God's Kingdom will make its way into the world despite all opposition—but quietly and without the fanfare of a political messianic movement? Does He mean that the ages will continue to unfold in a stately manner as the Last Day draws nearer? Most likely, the passage contains elements of all three ideas.

The final verse (v. 29) states in simple terms the profound elements associated with the Grand Finale to history. It reflects the spirit of Malachi 3:1.

4:30–32: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The focus here is on the concept of the Kingdom of God that has broken into history with Jesus. Jesus refers to a mustard seed to get His message across—a seed that was believed to be the smallest of seeds, even though it is not. The tiny mustard seed produces something eight to ten feet high—a giant among the garden-herbs with which it may be compared. The message is that the Kingdom's seemingly minute beginning is in dramatic contrast to the magnitude of its eventual full growth.

Jesus' parable echoes the Old Testament figure that describes Israel as a carefully nurtured cedar tree, the leaves of which provide shade and the branches refuge for all the birds of the air. However, in the Marcan context, the thing most worthy of note is the unpretentious beginning of something that, with the passing of time, will render blessed service to many.

4:33–34: In getting His message across to the crowds and His disciples, Jesus used images appropriate to their level of understanding.

Mark de-emphasizes the (to many) puzzling nature of Jesus' parables. After sharing the message of 4:26–34, Jesus does not do any more teaching with parables until the "parable in action" expressed in the cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20) and later the story of the vine-dressers (12:1–12).

Some summary thoughts: In Mark's opening chapters, Jesus initiates His disciples into the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world are very different from the Kingdom of God. People are suffering and Satan (the great deceiver) is still powerful. Yet in the end there will be a victory. The seeds of the Kingdom of God have been sown, and its process of growth is inevitable. The minuteness of the Kingdom's embryonic state provides a dramatic contrast to the magnitude of its eventual full growth. The contents of Mark 4:13–32 have much to say about the mystery of the Kingdom of God in terms of a process of growth. These truths are things that the disciples and "those about Him" must deal with as they join Jesus on his journey across the Sea of Galilee (next pericope).

June 24, The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 4:35–41

The incident outlined in 4:35–41 contains vivid details from the perspective of an eyewitness. It speaks of events that take place after sundown on a day that Jesus devoted to the teaching of parables, and describes Jesus' power over the storms and the sea.

V. 35: Jesus asks His disciples to take Him from the west side of the Sea of Galilee to its southeast coast. (This and all subsequent voyages on the Sea of Galilee, are ordered by Jesus.) Without a doubt, the disciples are deeply disturbed by Jesus' request. The region is not Jewish territory! *It is the Decapolis. Gentiles* live there—and they have *pigs*! After the group arrives at their destination, we are told that only Jesus gets out of the boat (5:1–2).

V. 36: Although this verse makes reference to other boats accompanying Jesus on His journey across the Sea of Galilee, no further mention is made of those boats. Possibly they are blown off course, or lost in the storm that overtakes Jesus' boat.

V. 37: "A great windstorm" ("a great hurricane of wind") overtakes the travelers. Still today, cold currents of air pass from west to east over the bowl in which the Sea of Galilee lies, and striking low-lying air there, create turbulence. Mark describes waves breaking over the sides of the boat—with the dangerous result that the boat begins to fill with water.

V. 38: Perhaps exhausted, perhaps merely to test the disciples' faith in His presence, Jesus is sleeping in the boat's stern with His head resting on a pillow of some kind. (See Jonah 1:5–6.)

The disciples, who are familiar with the Sea of Galilee and its moods, are overcome by panic and cry out in terror to the sleeping Jesus: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Perhaps they sense

some indifference on Jesus' part to their plight. (Matthew and Luke moderate their cry; see Matthew 8:23–25 and Luke 8:24.) Their cry reflects that of men who sense that they are in mortal danger.

V. 39: Jesus wakes up, and scolds the wind and addresses the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The effect is instantaneous!

V. 40: It is now Jesus' turn to reproach the disciples—this time because of their cowardice and lack of faith (*pistis*—utter trust in the power of God). Jesus' rebuke is not gentle; later He will address similar charges against them (Mark 7:18).

V. 41: The disciples have seen that Jesus' words were immediately effective. Something akin to faith is born of their fear. Although the storm has come and gone, they now have to deal with a reality of another order: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

When carrying out His ministry, Jesus does not go around proclaiming, “I am the Messiah” in words. He reveals His identity through His actions; see Isaiah 35:5–6. Furthermore, although the Jewish people were afraid of the winds and the sea, they took comfort in the fact that God had power over these things; see Psalm 107:23–32. In stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus makes a profound theological statement: “I am the Creator and the Lord of creation!”

In this incident, Mark highlights the double motif of Jesus' power and the disciples' failure. A crucial issue surfaces: Will the disciples understand who Jesus is and His purpose in going to the Decapolis region—or will they not?

A point to ponder in relation to Mark 5:1–20: As noted earlier, Jesus began His ministry to the *Jews* in a synagogue in Capernaum by casting a demon out of a man. He began His ministry to the *Gentiles* with a massive exorcism: by casting out a host of demons from a man in the Decapolis. The demons enter into pigs and drown themselves in the Sea of Galilee. By the drowning of the swine, Gentile land is exorcized—cleansed of Gentile pollution.

This cleansing of Gentile uncleanness gives a clue to the purpose of crossing of the lake. Jesus' mastering of the elements facilitates His passage to the Gentiles. The crossing symbolizes the opening of new frontiers. But do the disciples understand this?

July 1, The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 5:21–43

Mark 5:1–20 speaks of Jesus exorcizing a Gentile in the region of the Decapolis—to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

5:21 refers to Jesus returning to the west side of the Sea of Galilee—*possibly* to the region of Capernaum. After He arrives there, a great crowd gathers around Him on the seashore.

5:22–24: Jairus, a leader of a local Jewish synagogue, comes to Jesus, falls on his knees, and begs Him to come to his home as quickly as possible. His 12-year-old daughter is dying! Jairus refers to his “little daughter,” and seeks a cure—not resuscitation from death. Although the daughter is not yet dead, she is at the brink of death—but there is still hope that she can be healed. Jesus accedes to Jairus' request and sets out for his home.

5:25–34: At this point, there is a break in the Jairus narrative. The crowds that gather around Jesus along the way set the stage for a miracle within a miracle. By inserting the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman into that of Jairus' daughter, Mark dramatizes a sense of tension and focuses on the miracle of the resurrection.

A woman creeps up to Jesus, and secretly (so she hopes) touches His cloak. The woman has been suffering from a menstrual disorder for 12 years—a condition that makes her miserable in health and an unclean outcast among her family and community. Her hope is that if she can but touch Jesus' cloak, she will be healed. She touches Jesus' cloak—and is immediately healed! Jesus, sensing (better, “knowing”) what has taken place, asks, “Who touched My garments?” Of course, Jesus knows who touched Him, but He forces the woman to “confess” that she is the one who touched Him—which she does fearfully, expecting Jesus (and others in the surrounding crowd) to rebuke her in no uncertain terms. Jesus does not rebuke her. He addresses her as “Daughter,” commends her for her faith, and bids her to go in peace! In relating to the woman in this manner, Jesus once again does away with concern for laws having to do with ritual purity; see Leviticus 15:25–30, but note also the contents of 25:19–24 and 31–33.

5:35–43: After Jesus heals the woman with the menstrual disorder, He is told that Jairus' daughter has died. Nonetheless, Jesus goes to Jairus' house, taking with Him Peter, James, and John. After arriving at the house, He goes into the room where the dead girl lies—taking with Him the three disciples, Jairus, and his wife. He then takes the (ritually unclean!) dead girl by the hand and commands her to return to life. Those who witness her restoration to life are amazed! Jesus then commands them not to tell others what He has done and asks them to give the girl some food.

It is intriguing to note that the woman had been hemorrhaging for *twelve* years, and that Jairus' daughter was *twelve* years of age. (Is there a hint of a reference to “the 12 tribes of Israel” being restored to wholeness?) Jesus' actions in Mark 5 become more profound and radical when we understand that, according to the Jewish religious elite, two of the worst things a person could do were to touch a dead body, or to touch a menstruating woman. Those who touched such people were required to undergo expensive and time-consuming rituals—and resume normal life on the following day. However, other people do not *infect* Jesus with their uncleanness; He *infects* (“heals”) them with His divine wholeness.