

4 B Mark Overview

Roland Searle, who sadly recently passed away, is of course famous for St Trinians. But, as you may have realised, I didn't go to a girl's school. When I was young it was another Roland Searle creation, Molesworth who was the comedic mirror to my schoolboy days. Nigel Molesworth, "As any fule kno", was the scruffy boy chronicler of skool life (and yes he does spell that s k o o l) whose enthusiasm for expression overran his grammar and spelling.

I can't help think of Molesworth when I think of Mark's Gospel. Our English translations are clear, tidy and literate English. But the Evangelist Mark's Greek, was more enthusiastic than elegant. There is a breathlessness to his writing which gives it so much life and energy, which I am afraid the scholarly needs of English readers can squeeze out. The New Testament was written in what is called *koine* Greek, that is the shared the Greek, the common Greek, which was the means of communication between people few of whom had Greek as a first language. However, even in comparison with the relative sophistication of some other New Testament writers, Mark's Greek is primitive. But he invests his language with a great vim and vigour.

When I was that scruffy school boy I was taught one should not normally start sentences with a conjunction. It was not an absolute no no, and occasionally it have some literary merit in that it connects the sentence beginning with *and* with the sentence before and so it draws attention to the sentence and its link to what has just happened or has just been said. However, in the main this was considered was poor English style, and for that matter poor Greek style. Yet, with the Evangelist Mark the conjunction 'and' seems to start every sentence.

So a more literal reading of our Gospel passage today would be:

And they enter Capernaum (*NB The nice English translation we used changes that present tense into a past tense – the present tense is of course the first and easiest form of the verb you learn in a foreign language and so it is no surprise that that's the tense St Mark prefers.*)

And immediately entering the Synagogue on the Sabbath day he taught

And they were astounded at his teaching

For he was teaching them with authority and unlike the scribes

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit

And he cried out saying: "What are we to you Jesus of Nazareth? have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God"

I won't go on through the whole passage, but I hope you get the feel. In 8 verses we would see thirteen sentences or clauses beginning with 'and', three of which begin 'and immediately' and the only clause which doesn't start with *and* starts with another conjunction *for*. The effect of this is to build a sense of a chain of urgent and inter-related events. Because the enter Capernaum, they enter the synagogue, because Jesus enters the synagogue he teaches, and because he teaches with authority and because this is not like the scribes, they were astounded. Because they were astounded a man with an unclean spirit shouts out.

We had a lot of fuss in the media celebrating the King James Version of the Bible and the majestic poetic quality and almost Shakespearean grandeur of its English. Mark's Gospel in Greek is not majestic or poetic. It is more Molesworth than Shakespeare. However, it is filled with a sense

of urgency, a sense of something so important is happening he can only blurt it all out as quickly as he can. OK, it might be tedious to have every clause and sentence emphasised, but to Mark every clause and phrase is emphatic. They are all worth stressing.

For most of the Sundays of Ordinary time this year B we shall journey through St Mark's Gospel. I do hope than we can recover some of the excitement St Mark has in setting down this story. I hope we can get caught up into the urgency of what the Evangelist wishes to tell us.

Mark is the shortest Gospel and, as you might expect he squeezes so much into a very short book. The whole story of Jesus, what he did, what he taught, how he suffered and died and rose again is concentrated into 16 chapters. And it is indeed a breathless journey. Mark stresses Jesus' message about the kingdom of God now breaking into human life as good news and Jesus in his own person is that Good News of God. Jesus is the Son whom God has sent to rescue, restore and raise up humanity by serving and by suffering and by sacrificing his life.

The lectionary we follow on Sundays has three main units. The first is the shortest unit which have already read over the past few weeks. We are introduced to the figure of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. The second unit we have now started and will read in the period up until Lent and pick up again after Easter is by far the longest unit. The Lectionary describes this as *The Mystery progressively revealed*. Bit by bit we learn more of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah and how the disciples learn step by step who Jesus is and what he has come to do. This gradual coming to understanding is an important element of Mark's Gospel and

we journey with the disciples as they deepen their awareness of who it is they are following.

Actually that word 'Mystery' is a useful one in thinking of Mark's Gospel. Mystery is something beyond our current understanding: only through God's unveiling of the mystery can we move to greater understanding. It is a word we find fairly frequently in St Paul, and Mark is associated with St Paul. The word is employed just once in the Gospel, at Mk 4:11, and its content there is the open secret that God's reign is now breaking into human life with its reversal of human values. There is a related sense in which Jesus' real identity was a mystery although demons and demoniacs knew it, such as the unclean spirit in today's Gospel passage. Jesus warned against telling of his mighty deeds. Further, Jesus teaches by parables so those "outside" the kingdom do not understand, but only those to whom the mystery has been revealed.

The third unit follows on from the moment the disciples finally get it: St Peter's confession of Faith at Caesarea Philippi. This unit also marks a change in the geography of the Gospel. Most of the Gospel has been in Galilee but the third section sees Jesus and his disciples move from South from Galilee to Judea and towards Jerusalem and the climax of the story in Jerusalem. This final section is where it all comes together and the full Mystery of Jesus is revealed for all who have the eyes to see.

In this Year B may we get caught up in the Mystery St Mark lays before us. May we see what he wishes us to see and in seeing may we be healed and cleansed and made new. May our lives be filled with the Good News of Jesus.