

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 37: Jesus as God With Us

Daily Reading for Week

- Mark 3-4, Psalm 96
- Mark 5-6, Psalm 97
- Mark 7-8, Psalm 98
- Mark 9-10, Psalm 99
- Mark 11-12, Psalm 100
- Mark 13-14, Psalm 101
- Mark 15-16, Psalm 102
- Read Scripture Video: The Gospel of the Kingdom (themed video), The Messiah (themed video), and Mark

Focus of time together

To explore another Gospel story to see hints at the divinity of Jesus and to savour the subtle beauty of the Gospels.

Connecting Exercise

In what areas of your life do you feel like things are against you meaning you're struggling to make headway?

Opening Prayer

Pray corporately for your continued journey through the Gospels, expressing your hopes and desires, concerns and confusions, and asking the Spirit of God to be gracious to you in the journey.

Intro to Discussion

Every year around Christmas time, we sing these ancient carol lines:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.*

Emmanuel means God with us, a title from Old Testament texts like Isaiah and later given symbolically to Jesus. We sing this carol as part of our Christmas celebration, recognising the scandalous incarnation of Israel's God in the person of Jesus. Yet, many Biblical critics from the past century or so have made the claim that Jesus

never identified himself as Yahweh. The doctrine of incarnation, it is posited, was a later invention of the church. Part of what we'll try to see this week is that the conclusion that the Gospels don't depict Jesus as the embodiment of God can only be reached by a careless misreading of Scripture. If we pay attention to the Gospel writers' many subtle textual hints, we'll see that it is quite obvious that they are alluding to the incomprehensible idea that God had become human in Jesus.

In addition, we'll hope to learn and admire something about the Gospels as works of literary genius. There are many reasons why an author like Mark doesn't come right out and say, "Jesus was God!" (like John seems to do). To a Jew, the concept of incarnation was about as paradigm-blowing and incomprehensible as any idea you can imagine. This is still true today despite 2,000 years of Christian proclamation. Imagine how much more so this would have been true in the first century. The Gospel that God "became human and lived among us" (John 1:14) was so scandalous as to be unspeakable for the first Jews and apostles to believe it. It was a reality too sacred and paradoxical for such plain human speech. This is why Mark's Gospel, the first of the four Gospels to be written, doesn't speak about incarnation in the kind of plainspeak we might expect it to. Rather, Mark ingeniously weaves throughout his Gospel a pattern of Old Testament hints and allusions that lead the careful reader to the undeniable conclusion that Jesus was somehow both fully divine and fully human. Rather than use the kind of systematic language like "Trinity" and "Incarnation" that we are accustomed to, Mark paints a sort of impressionistic masterpiece, the full picture of which is only made visible when we step back and take it all in.

"Jesus said, *'Whoever has ears, let them hear.'*" (Mark 4:9)

Whole Group Discussion (45 minutes)

Questions for Basic Understanding

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

Read Mark 6:45-52

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

1. How do you experience Jesus in this story?
2. What do you discover about who Jesus is?

Read Job 9:1-8

Then Job answered:

Yes, I know what you've said is true,
but how can a person be justified before God?
If one wanted to take Him to court,
he could not answer God once in a thousand times.
God is wise and all-powerful.
Who has opposed Him and come out unharmed?
He removes mountains without their knowledge,
overturning them in His anger.
He shakes the earth from its place
so that its pillars tremble.
He commands the sun not to shine
and seals off the stars.
He alone stretches out the heavens
and walks *on the waves of the sea*.

Now reread Mark 6:47-52

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, *walking on the sea*. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

1. Notice this echo of Job 9 in the story of Jesus walking on the water. How does this connection to the Old Testament text talking about God having the power to walk on the sea hint at the true identity of Jesus?
2. Now that you've read the story twice, does anything about this scene stand out to you as odd?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Now read further in Job 9, picking up in verse 8 and reading through verse 12:

He alone stretches out the heavens
and walks on the waves of the sea.
He makes the stars: the Bear, Orion,
the Pleiades, and the constellations of the southern sky.
He does great and unsearchable things,

wonders without number.

If He passes by me, I wouldn't see Him;

if He goes right by, I wouldn't recognise Him.

If He snatches something, who can stop Him?

Who can ask Him, "What are You doing?"

Now reread Mark 6:47-52 once more:

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. *He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost*, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

If the first connection to Job 9 seemed questionable, this otherwise bizarre statement that Jesus meant to pass by them is an undeniable reference to that text. Consider the statements about the unrecognisable otherworldliness of God encapsulated in Job 9:11: "If He passes by me, I wouldn't see Him; if He goes right by, I wouldn't recognise Him." And notice the disciples' inability to recognise Jesus and the fear that this caused them. This additional connection between Jesus' walking on the water and the Job passage not only reinforces the divinity of Jesus but also makes a subtly profound statement about how difficult it would be to recognise God even if he walked right past us.

1. How does this connection summarise how difficult it was for people — even Jesus' closest friends — to see him for who He truly was?

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Questions for Self Examination

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware of who we are in the light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. Later in Mark's Gospel, he records Jesus speaking directly to those who are failing to recognise the meaning behind his actions, saying, "Don't you understand or comprehend? Is your heart hardened? Do you have eyes, and not see, and do you have ears, and not hear?" (Mark 8:17-18). How might you be susceptible to having eyes but not truly seeing Jesus?
2. Specifically, how might the Holy Spirit want to use this intricate story to point out your inability to recognise God with you in the everyday moments and events of life?
3. Consider what you shared in the connecting exercise about where you feel like you're struggling to make headway in life. How might Jesus be with you in these struggles in ways you have not recognised? Ask the others in the group to share any insight the Holy Spirit might give to them about how God is (and has been) with you.

Closing Prayer

Pray by giving thanks to God for His presence with us, lamenting the feeling of His absence, and confessing your failure to rightly recognise and appreciate Him.