Dear Bible Students,

I pray that you are well during these days in the wilderness (= the Hebrew title of the fourth book of the Torah in the Bible, Numbers) of Lent, the holy season of fasting and prayer in remembrance of the forty days of Jesus in the desert, which were a recapitulation of the forty years of Israel in the wilderness. We have been reading and rereading the Gospel according to Mark, which explores and expounds the meaning of Jesus as the suffering Son of God. Mark’s is a seemingly tragic gospel in many ways—the disappointments and failures of the disciples who never quite seem to understand who Jesus is and who they are (*the* Twelve), the painful, ignominious end of Jesus’ life, the disciples’ desertion of Jesus—yet it may hold out more hope and comfort than the other canonical Gospels when addressing our experience of life, our fragile faith, our experience of God’s absence, and our feeble understanding of Jesus.

We are in the middle of reading Mark 4 and Jesus’ telling of parables. I suggested in last class that we should always try to follow the story *Jesus tells* and *the way* he tells them, while bracketing or even ignoring the traditional titles and interpretations of them. In the parable about the sower, I mentioned that Jesus tells a peculiar, incredulous story of a sower who lets seeds drop indiscriminately on four different places, which notwithstanding the (great?) loss of seeds, ends with a bumper crop. The end is as significant as the beginning. The sower sows (haphazardly) and brings forth an amazing, fruitful yield. We should reflect on this pattern of a positive, joyful ending of puzzling, precarious experiences. Please remind me to comment more on this.

Please remember the Marcan theme of the secrecy of Jesus’ true identity and how that relates to the main theme of Jesus as the suffering Son of God, a mystery that the disciples never grasp but only the Roman centurion utters (Mark 15.39), out ignorance yet speaking a profound insight and truth about Jesus. Please keep rereading Mark for new insights about Jesus and how Mark wants to present the story of Jesus. Perhaps it would help to review what I sent before:

From all that we have read, asked, and learned since April 2021, when we began our sojourn through the Bible, see what you think of the themes and language of Mark, e.g.:

How does Mark begin? What might that indicate?

What are Mark’s main points or arguments?

What is it trying to argue or demonstrate? How does it do that—what words and ideas does it present?

What portrait of Jesus emerges in Mark? How about the of the disciples, the so-called Twelve?

What does Jesus do and say?

Who is the intended audience?

At what verse does the Gospel end? How many endings to Mark are there? Which ending do you prefer?

What do you find inspiring in Mark? Or helpful? Curious? Disappointing? Annoying? Troublesome?

After all the myriad questions and attempted answers, so what? What could we learn from Mark for our faith journey?

Please review below the information I sent last year (!) on the canon.

As we trek through the Gospels, we will learn about the new empire in charge of the world, viz., that of the Romans, as we review the empire-culture-world built by the Greeks—especially Alexander the Great—after their victory over the Persians, who in turn had replaced, the Babylonians, who replaced the Assyrians, and before that the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus.

consider the Greeks:

[www.pbs.org/empires/thegreeks/htmlver](http://www.pbs.org/empires/thegreeks/htmlver)

If you are adventurous, read about the “Synoptic Problem,” which I will cover slowly and repeatedly enough for us to find it helpful in our interpretation of the synoptic Gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke—*synoptic* is from the Greek word meaning to *see together* or *to be seen together*. I will say more on this in class, but feel free to ask your questions any time.

As always, I look forward to **your observations and questions**, and please never hesitate to **suggest any biblical, theological, or life topics** along the way, even if they are only tangentially related. We can be flexible and take detours on our journey through the Bible. Remember that the unofficial title of our Bible study thus far is “Anything and everything you always wanted to ask about the Bible but were to afraid or busy to ask.”

Please see the [“syllabus” online](http://www.dropbox.com/sh/4absbpuggvqu2oy/AABGloIpXgSwCUfNeCiZ-WfXa?dl=0) for where we are headed: [Bible intro 2021-04 Ann’s Choice](https://www.dropbox.com/s/zpy3ca1j2a02ppn/Bible%20intro%202021-04%20Ann%27s%20Choice%20%28handout.pdf?dl=0) (also attached; printed copies available in front of my office in Resident Life, Liberty Commons).

For Zoomers, here are the instructions:

Zoom (online or using an app):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82395191045?pwd=TTRiQklwR2RhRzZkNFNxU2RRbGRoUT09>

Meeting ID:                  823 9519 1045

Meeting Password:       annschoice

Dial in by telephone: nearest phone access in New York City

Dial 1 (929) 205 6099

Enter Meeting ID: 823 9519 1045, followed by “#”

Enter Passcode: 394871 if requested

See you in class or via Zoom. Have a wonder-ful evening.

With prayer and best wishes,

A picture containing text

Description automatically generated