group Bible Study – April 2, 2008

Read Mark chapters 1 and 16

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The very first verse of Mark tells us that this is the “beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah.” That’s a very important opening sentence! Mark tells us that Jesus is the “Messiah” – which is a Hebrew word that means something like “the deliverer that we’ve been waiting for.” In the Greek language, this word is translated “Christ.” This tells us that the story Mark is about to tell is very important indeed: Jesus is the one we’ve been waiting for, so pay attention!

And I find one more thing remarkable about the first sentence of this book. Mark says that this is the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah. No doubt this can be taken a number of ways, but it also means this: the story in this book is incredible good news, but it’s just the beginning. As a Christian person today, I believe the fantastic good news of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. But I believe that this was just the beginning. There is more good news to come. Jesus was not just the long-expected messiah to free the people of Israel. He is the long-expected messiah who will one day free the whole earth. What he started 2,000 years ago will be finished on the day that he hands over this whole creation to his Father.

Mark also makes a very important move by starting this gospel with the story of Jesus’ baptism. What’s going on here? In the Old Testament prophet Joel, we read a promise that God makes to the people. He says “In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your daughters and sons will prophesy.” So when Mark opens up this gospel by telling this story about the Spirit of God falling on Jesus, he’s saying… People! It’s happening! The promises are being fulfilled, and we can expect that God is about to pour out his Spirit on all flesh!

And indeed, the Baptism of Jesus really is something very profound. The apostle Paul tells us that when the kingdom of God comes, God’s Spirit will be all in all. We will live in the Spirit and the Spirit will live in us. So when the Spirit of God falls on Jesus, this is incredible good news! It’s happening! The Spirit is beginning to fill creation! The promises are real!

Of course, as people living 2,000 years later, we also know that God’s kingdom hasn’t fully come yet. The beginning of the Good News is here, but we haven’t seen the end. Our world does not yet live in a way that is completely filled by the Spirit of God. But it’s coming. Death is here, but Life is coming. Wholeness is coming. Jesus is coming. And this quarter we’re going to study his life and his teachings and we’re going to do everything we can to follow him until this Good News has been completed.

Question:

— Just one question to ponder this week, but it’s a big one that needs a lot of thought and conversation: In our reading for this week we’re doing chapter 1 and chapter 16. The bookend chapters of this gospel. Things like bookends are important literary hints as to what’s going on in the whole book. Why do you think this gospel begins and ends the way it does—with the Spirit falling on Jesus and his resurrection from the dead? How does this connect to Jesus’ central proclamation:

“*The kingdom of God has come near!*”