

Experiencing the Gospel of Mark through Worship

The key thing to help people appreciate about the Gospel of Mark is the sense of the 'movement' which dominates Mark's story. It is this movement: immediacy/sowing/breaking/sharing/starting again that we are attempting to convey in the worship resources provided. Our key Gospel passage used in the material is the account of the Last Supper given in **Mark 14.12-28** though we also use and allude to several other parts of the Gospel. For this Gospel in which the Passion of Jesus is so central it is right that our worship should be centred round the events immediately preceding Jesus' death, and remind ourselves that a key (the key?) incentive for Communion is to remember this death. Mark also emphasises the link between Communion and the Jewish Passover: Christ is, like the Passover Lamb, to be broken and eaten to inaugurate a new 'covenant' between God and human beings, and like the Passover his sacrifice must be 'remembered'.

Prepare the way/Introduction

You will clearly need to find a point at or near the beginning of the service to explain what is happening. *If you have access to cooking facilities an effective way of beginning the service would be with someone publicly kneading dough, for its final kneading, and then removing it for cooking, to be used in the Communion later on.*

Whether or not this is possible then use a chant based on 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord':

e.g. Godspell/Jesus Christ Superstar or 'Make way, make way' (Mission Praise, Junior Praise) sung several times by all. Then one voice proclaims:

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee saying: The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, Repent and believe in the gospel (*Mark 1.14-15*).

As these words are read someone walks quite quickly from the back to the front of the church, scattering seeds (of corn if possible) over the congregation with powerful gestures. Ask people to pick up the seeds, and share them around so that everyone can hold up a grain.

Prayer of confession

Leader: Let us reflect for a moment on our lives into which the seed of the word of God has fallen.

Perhaps there have been times when we have been like rocky ground, hard and unreceptive.

Perhaps there have been times when thorns and cares have almost choked the life out of our faith.

Perhaps there have been times when we barely listened at all, before our attention turned aside to what seemed then more important matters.

We acknowledge all this, but yet we also give you thanks, O God, that you in your grace have seen hope and possibility in us, and have given us the opportunity to grow in the life of faith and to bear fruit for your glory.

Pause for a moment of silence while people reflect and then the following is read:

Leader: Glory to you:

New Covenant Maker,
Sower of Seeds,
for whom and through whom, all things exist.

People: We thank you for re-creating us.

Leader: Glory to you:

Christ of the Field,
Nurturer of seedlings,
pointing to the possibilities of growth.

People: We thank you for being with us.

Leader: Glory to you:

Harvesting Spirit,
Winnower of husk and chaff,
blowing through our hopes for today.

People: We thank you for renewing us.

Leader: *(gesturing to include everybody)*

To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God.

What do people think that the 'secret' is? Let's try and solve it! We have a quiz to help us.

Mystery Quiz?

(Do it in small groups; people will need Bibles to help.)

1. What does seeds of corn grow into? *(Answer: Wheat and Barley)*
2. What staple food do you make with the answer to Question 1? *(Answer: Bread)*
3. What did Jesus break into pieces and share to feed a lot of people? *(Answer: Bread or loaves)*
4. Why does Jesus get cross with his disciples in a boat when they claim that they have no bread with them. Read Mark 8. 14-17 to help you find out? *(Answer: Because Jesus himself is 'Bread' although the disciples have failed to realise it.)*
5. Who did Jesus say was the 'Bread of Life' in John 6.35? *(Answer: Himself)*
6. What did Jesus break and share with his friends on the night before he was killed? *(Answer: Bread)*
7. What did he say as he was doing the action in Question 6? *(Answer: This is my body.)*
8. What does John 12.24 say has to happen to a seed?*(Answer: Fall into the ground and die.)*
9. The story in Mark 4.14 says that the seed is the 'word of God.' Who or what does John 1.14 tell us is 'the Word of God' become a human being? *(Answer: Jesus himself)*
10. So who or what is the seed? *(Answer: Jesus himself)*

Pause for a moment - are people beginning to guess the secret? Put as simply as possible: the secret is that Jesus himself is the 'seed corn' of the Kingdom. Like seed he too must die if he is to become 'Bread' to feed all those who are invited to the feast in the Kingdom of God. It's a secret because:

- Seeds are 'secret' by nature. They are like nature's timer delay switches. The fruit is there in essence - but you can't see it yet.
- The message that Jesus, the seed, 'must die' is too uncomfortable to say openly, until the disciples realise that the cross is the road Jesus will travel - and they may have to travel it with him. In our earlier prayers it seemed as though we might be called to be the 'seed' as well... so what does this mean?

Activity

Have seven people each holding *either* a placard with a picture *or* an object to represent one line in each of the following two verses. As their line is read, they make an appropriate action for the words.

Having tried the reading once or twice with a reader, let the whole congregation say it together at speed, perhaps a couple of times. *NB* If you have kneaded dough at the beginning save a part for using here.

Poem: Planting the seeds

Here is the seed going into the ground
That grows into wheat yellow and round
That is threshed by combine harvester power
That is ground between stones to make fine flour
That is mixed into dough with water and yeast
That is cooked into bread for our daily feast
Which reminds us of Christ the body of life.

Here is the seed going into the ground
That grows into grapes red and round
That is squashed in a press to get juice from the flesh
That is poured into vats while it is still fresh
That is mixed with water, sugar and yeast
That is stored in green bottles for a family feast
Which reminds us of Christ the blood of life.

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Gospel reading

Mark 14.12-25, perhaps using two voices, one as narrator, the other to read the 'spoken' parts. While the reading is read the minister moves towards the altar/communion table, and the bread (? baked from the dough seen at the beginning of the service) and wine are brought. If you are not having Communion the bread and wine could be shared after the reading. Otherwise continue as follows:

Prayer Poem of Offering

Heads bowed
Stalks cut,
Ears threshed,
Grain crushed,
White flour.

Head bowed,
Fingers working,
Yeast - flour
Dough rising,
Bread cooked.

We offer you, Father, this bread,
Fruit of the earth
And work of human hands.
Blessed be God for ever.

Heads bowed,
Bread no more.
Christ's Body
Given for all.

Heads bowed,
Daily bread
Held in hand,
Life's strand,
God enfleshed.

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Sentence before Communion

(said by all)

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, because we all partake in the one bread.

Distribution of communion

A possible way for communion to be distributed would be to invite people to come up in silence and 'communicate themselves' from the bread and the wine left on the table/altar.

Hymn during communion

The Song of the Supper (*Travelling the Road to Freedom, Wild Goose*)

After communion, or to conclude the service, read Mark 14.26-28, with a narrator and a voice for Jesus. After the reading the person representing Jesus 'disappears'.

Final prayer

(said by all)

Father, in baptism we die to sin.
rise again to new life,
and find our true place in your living body.
Send us out sealed in Christ's blood
of the new covenant,
to bring healing and reconciliation
to this wounded world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Words of dismissal

Leader: Jesus is walking ahead of us up to Jerusalem again

People: And those who follow are afraid

or And though we are afraid we follow him.

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Give people some seeds to take home and plant - choose seeds that are appropriate to plant at this season.

Encourage people to leave the church quickly.