

Ears to Hear

Chapter Two: Part Two

Why a Gospel?

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Luke 1

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21

We do not know why the gospel of Mark was written. Was he tasked to write it? Did a community clamor for a written account so to preserve an oral tradition? Were the apostles dying and a new generation needed to capture their memories? Was Mark's gospel a spectacularly bold endeavor?

These questions represent the path of scholars. For generations, or since the sixteenth century, students of the bible have chosen one. Mark was inspired or directed by the Holy Spirit. This is the most magical of views. Here the author is merely moving his pen over the page at the dictate of the voice of God; he is a kind of possessed pen.

Alongside the divinely inspired pen is the romantic notion that Mark was a member of a community who needed a gospel to be written. Here the church is the inspiration. The community needed a gospel and from the community came this gospel. Unfortunately, such communal writing is profoundly inconsistent with how anything is written. Crowds shout, communities sing, but rarely do they compose an account or arrange the harmony to be sung.

The death of the apostles is a compelling possibility mainly because it is practical. It makes sense. We know that unless things are written down, the memory fades, the words that are not transcribed float away into the sea of time. It is likely that the dying generation felt like Job, "O that I had an iron pen and could write down what the Lord has done." This idea carries water until we look at the gospels themselves. They are not written as memoir nor do they claim to be the first hand account of an apostle.

The last common path, the gospel as bold, creative endeavor, has power in its simplicity. Someone named Mark wrote something we call a "gospel." While Matthew, Mark, and Luke

are different, they each contain a shared intent. They each describe the life of Jesus during the last three years of his life. How they describe these three years has been the source of endless speculations about genre and influence. Is this bold, creative endeavor patterned after a Greek “bio” or a Hebrew prophetic account? Does Mark represent a high level of literature or a popular one?

Where this last path comes to a great road block is that it utterly fails to answer the “why” question. That Mark wanted to write a gospel is not a rock on which we can build. And perhaps we should not build. Just let Mark be Mark.

In our reflection heretofore, we have not chosen any of the four exclusively. Indeed, one need not choose any of the four. The one that comes closest to our theory is the last. Mark chose to write a gospel, a bold and creative endeavor. He wrote not with a magic pen nor with a need to capture the voice of a dying generation. He wrote to challenge the apostolic generation; he did what most people do when they leave aside a tradition: he offered a bold direction to counter a perceived problem.

The problem: the images, ideas, beliefs, and claims about Jesus had become far too cosmic. The death of Jesus was overshadowing the life of Jesus. With the Apostle Paul, perhaps the only remaining writings we have of the apostolic generation, Jesus was transcendent, glorious, all powerful, the creator and judge of all, whose imminent return with angels overshadowed all earthly concerns. Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus was the point; the cross was the way, the truth, and the life. We can read the Gospel of Mark as a rather bold response to this cosmic flight. It was as if he sought to pin the church down with a pen. He wrote and described a very earthy Jesus.

For some the idea that the gospel writer had such intent may be inconsistent with the Bible as “the word of God.” This is not Mark’s word; this is God’s word. And I believe Mark is “the word of God for us.” Yet, I also believe Mark had a great hand and a clear purpose in writing his account of the last three years of Jesus’ life. I take this purpose and intent from the first words in Luke’s gospel and the last words of John’s.

The first words in Luke display a clear intent as well as the need to choose. Luke wants to make an orderly account and he consulted the attempts of others. We are not sure who these others may be, but according to his words, his gospel was a matter of focus. He wanted “Theophilus” to “know the truth.” The truth would be found in the order he crafted.

The last words of John’s Gospel display such intentionality. He tells us the acts of Jesus are as numerous as beyond being contained in books. As we will discuss near the end of our reflection, any claim in the gospel of John must be filtered many times before we taste his intent. But, for now, let us simply say, his words belie a significant level of choice. If books cannot contain all the deeds of Jesus, why were the deeds you recorded chosen? Out of such a vast store, what makes these selections so important?

Mark has no such claims. Mark doesn’t even have a proper beginning. No stories of birth, no genealogies, no poems of creation. “Here begins the gospel” is all we have. Yet, perhaps this is enough. In this declaration we have his choice. “We being here. . . .”

Lore and Legend

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.

Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled."

All of them deserted him and fled.

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Mark 14

The church in Babylon, chosen like yourselves, sends you greetings and so does my son Mark.

IPeter 5

The legend is that Mark was Peter's gospel. Mark is the memory of Peter.

So brightly shone the light of true religion on the minds of Peter's hearers that, not satisfied with a single hearing or with the oral teaching of the divine message, they resorted to appeals of every kind to induce Mark (whose gospel we have), as he was a follower of Peter, to leave them in writing a summary of the instruction they had received by word of mouth, nor did they let him go till they had persuaded him, and thus became responsible for the writing of what is known as the Gospel according to Mark. Eusebius 49

This is the legend according to Eusebius, the church historian who wrote during the time of Constantine (mid-4th century). It is tempting here to suggest that this is strong evidence that the gospel of Mark is the living memory of Peter. Yet, to do such needs to be seen in light of 300 years. Eusebius is accounting for the belief of the church in the 4th century about the church in the first.

Another legend is that the naked man who runs from the garden was Mark. His naked flight is meant as a metaphor that he leaves no trace on this work. The gospel is without his personality or perspective. The gospel has nothing coming between Jesus and the reader as the man who flees has nothing between our sight and his skin.

I love both of these legends. They are imaginative and intriguing. Mostly, though, the legend that the naked Mark is the protégé of Peter and his scribe creates a profound balance in the New Testament. In Paul we have the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which takes us to the cosmos; in Mark we have the life and teachings of Jesus as experienced by Peter in Galilee and Judea. We have heaven and earth.

Moreover, if Matthew and Luke are adaptations or developments of Mark, then the heart of the sacred writings we possess flow from Peter. This helps me understand the development of the Church as recorded in the book of Acts. Acts is the story of Peter and then Paul. The church moves from Jewish endeavor to a Gentile world. If we understand the synoptic gospels¹ as the legacy of Peter, then we have a great balance to the letters of Paul. We also have a movement from a humble hilltop village to the ends of the earth.

Mostly though, what we have is a way of moving our theory forward just a bit. Our theory is that the church as evidenced in the letters of Paul was becoming all too cosmic. Mark, according to Eusebius, is tasked to write a gospel in Rome with Peter which would have been at the very end of his life. Albeit legend, this helps explain the why of Mark. Yet, it also jives with the idea of something different, something new, that was a need at this point in the life of the church.

With this we are ready to move unto what Mark wrote. As we do let's recast the gospel in light of Eusebius. Mark was called to write a gospel that flowed from Peter when they were in Rome; the call to write the gospel was from a community of believers who expressed a need; this was near the end of Peter's life. Mark wrote out the life and death of Jesus as Peter described it. The gospel of Mark was the experience of Peter become shared memory and composed by a "son" or next generation.

If we are to take the last words of John at face value, then Mark was selecting from the memories of Peter that were vast and beyond catalogue. If we are to impose the claim of Luke, then Mark sought to order the experiences of Peter so to convey the truth.

One last claim about Eusebius. He described the desire of the Roman church as born of the "hearers of Peter." What did the hearers hear? Is it that Peter simply told stories of the life of Jesus and Mark wrote down these stories?

The theory of most scholars is that the gospels were born of hearing in worship. The good news emerged in preaching, prayer, and song. Could it be that the pieces of Mark are meant to be heard in worship? Could it be that each one is a place to preach? After a decade of preaching the pericopes of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the order in which they were

¹ The synoptic gospels refers to the way Matthew, Mark and Luke can be seen and read as the same story. Synoptic is a Greek word meaning syn- with and optic-seen.

fashioned, I would give unequivocal yes. The order of Mark's pericopes are not just for reading, they are also for preaching.

Peter's Memories Born of Preaching

Immediately

- And when he came out of the water, **immediately** he saw the heavens openend. 1.10
- And the Spirit **immediately** drove him out into the wilderness. 1.12
- Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And **immediately** they left their nets.1.18
- He went a little further and, he saw James and . . . John . . . mending their nets. **Immediately** he called them.1.20
- And they went to Capernaum; and **immediately** on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. 1.21
- **Immediately** there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. 1.23
- And **immediately** he left the synagogue. 1.29
- Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and **immediately** they told him of her. 1.30
- A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "if you choose you can make me clean." Moved with pity Jesus stretched out his hand . . . **immediately** the leprosy left him. 1.42
- And **immediately** Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they were discussing these questions. 2.8
- "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and **immediately** took the mat and went out before all of them." 2.12
- He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and **immediately** conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. 3.6
- Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and **immediately** it sprang up. 4.5- parable of the sower
- And these in like manner are the ones sown upon rocky ground, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan **immediately** comes and takes away the word which is sown in them. 4.15- parable of the sower
- And these in like manner are the ones sown upon rocky ground, who, when they hear the word, **immediately** receive it with joy. 4.16- parable of the sower
- **Immediately** they fall away. 4.17-parable of the sower
- And when they stepped out of the boat, **immediately** a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 5.2
- **Immediately** her haemorrhage stopped. 5.29

- And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, **immediately** turned about in the crowd. 5.30
- And **immediately** the girl got up and began to walk about. 5.42
- **Immediately** she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist." 6.25
- **Immediately** the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. 6.27
- **Immediately** he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead. 6.45
- But **immediately** he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 6.50
- And when they got out of the boat, **immediately** the people recognized him. 6.54
- And **immediately** his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 7.35
- And **immediately** he got into the boat with disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. 8.10
- When the whole crowd saw him, they were **immediately** overcome with awe. 9.15
- They brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, **immediately** it convulsed the boy. 9.20
- **Immediately** the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief." 9.24
- **Immediately** he regained his sight and followed him on the way. 10.52
- Go into the village opposite you, and **immediately** as you enter it you will find a colt tied. 11.2
- If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, The Lord has need of it and will send it back here **immediately.**" 11.3
- **Immediately** while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. 14.43
- And **immediately** the cock crowed a second time. 14.72

One of the most persistent things that Peter remembered was that things around Jesus happened "at once" or "immediately." 35 times Mark recorded that things happened really fast. Through the centuries this immediacy has been part of the image of Mark.

In Christian art Mark is depicted as a lion. The image is to convey a sense of speed and attack. It is as if you are supposed to hold onto your hat when you read this gospel. True to form when I found myself standing before the opening sermon of Mark, standing before almost three-years-worth of preaching, I described it as a fast ball.

As a youth I went to the batting cages to improve my swing. At these cages the progression of speed was marked outside of each cage. So should the gospels be I argued. Luke is like facing a 70 mile an hour pitch. Fast, but doable. Matthew was 80 miles an hour, faster, but

still workable. Mark, Mark was a 90 mile an hour fast ball. Just hold on because things are going to get cookin'.

There is not much in the way of explanation for this immediacy. Theologians like Karl Barth might suggest that Mark was trying to convey the inbreaking quality of the incarnation. Jesus was like an earthquake, a tearing open of creation. Maybe.

Others have suggested that this is to convey power. Power is all about Jesus. But this theme doesn't convey the variety of ways things happen immediately.

Matthew and Luke each record things happening immediately. Matthew says this 14 times. Luke records immediacy 12 times. Interestingly, Matthew simply follows Mark, but Luke has many instances that are different from Mark. Most importantly is that Mark uses the Greek word "euthus"² more than twice, almost three times, more than the those that followed him. This is important because on many occasions Matthew and Luke told the same story, but omitted the sense of things happening "immediately." Hence, this is either Peter's memory or how Mark heard Peter speak his memories.

Controversies

If you read the gospels as an account, if you read it from beginning to end, one thing comes clear: the Pharisees really didn't like Jesus. They hated him.

In the safety of 2000 years of distance, in the light of the resurrection, and legacy of anti-Semitism, it is hard to see the Pharisees as anything but empty hypocrites. Even more, it is easy to see them as violent, powerful men with evil in their hearts.

Yet, if we look to the path that Mark lays out, it is not as easy as saying, "Jesus good; Pharisees bad." No one understands Jesus except the demons. No one listens to him and follows his direction except to fetch a donkey. The life of Jesus that Peter remembers as they walked around Judea and Galilee and the territory of the Decapolis, this life is happening fast, but it is also a bit on fire. Everywhere Jesus goes until the transfiguration is marked by controversy and debate. Mostly, it is marked with Jesus making the Pharisees angry.

Here is a list of the controversies Peter remembered.

Jesus:

Heals a paralytic so to forgive sins.

Ate with sinners

Didn't fast

Failed to observe the Sabbath

Healed on the Sabbath

² "Euthus" is a adverb in Greek whose literal meaning is "at once" or "immediately." When Matthew wrote his gospel he used this word 14 times; Luke 12 times.

Demons obeyed him
Offended his hometown
Ate with defiled hands
Would not produce a sign
Denounces the scribes
No acknowledgement of authority
Told the parable of the wicked tenants
Refuses to reject taxes
Rejects time without resurrection
Claims himself Messiah

It is important to remember how precarious the life of Jesus was. From the time of his ultimate arrest to his being nailed to a cross is less than 12 hours. Each one of the above could have been enough to receive such punishment. That there were so many controversies in three years and the fact that Pharisees didn't just have him killed in Galilee is actually a complicated question.

Mark records that the Pharisees feared that an uprising would result if they killed Jesus. The people thought he was a prophet, and he healed many people. Although Mark doesn't record a controversy in every pericope, he has far too many instances than what a normal peasant would be afforded.

To hear the memories of Peter recorded by Mark as a 1st century believer, one of the above controversies would have been enough to answer the question: why did Jesus die? Any one of the fifteen would have been enough. Hence it is important to hear what the fifteen controversies created. They create an enormous image of danger and chaos. Again, the Pharisees were ready to kill Jesus in Galilee before he became famous. But they waited.

The crowd believed Jesus was a prophet or more. The Pharisees were unconvinced that Jesus was a holy person. He was reckless and lawless. They felt compelled to expose him as a charlatan. I believe this is one of the keys to hearing and following Mark. Mark paints Jesus as reckless and lawless. He is not cosmic order or an eternal judge. Peter remembers Jesus and his fellow disciples walking through danger. And he remembers Jesus as fanning those flames of danger.

The Pharisees were the responsible leaders in the time of Jesus. Although each gospel will portray them as evil, hard hearted, and hypocritical, we need to be careful with the easy reading, simply assuming that they are bad people. It is too easy to simply say they were corrupt and thus bad. Jesus was always arguing with them, but he also gave them a lot of respect. Only in the last week of his life does he confront them directly.

Later in our study we will explore the possibility that the Pharisees in the gospels are anyone who seeks to determine the right faith, the correct belief, the standard that judges others. In other words they may be a historical figure used as a literary device. For now though it is important to consider that when Peter reflected upon the three years of walking with Jesus, when he preached for thirty years after the resurrection, the controversies with the Pharisees were a very fresh memory.

When Peter and the eleven walked with Jesus around Galilee and then into Jerusalem, there were controversies. The Pharisees were angry, frightened, threatened, and in the end willing to do violence. Peter remembered this; he told these stories. Although there were less controversies than things that happened immediately, the controversies shape the recounting of Peter's memories.

To hear Mark's gospel then we must be attentive to how quickly life moves and how likely it is that significant change will be met with opposition, even hatred.

Silence and Secrets

The Gospel of Mark is often described as containing the "messianic secret." This idea is about a century old. The idea is meant to make sense of the reason why Jesus told people to keep his words and his action and his identity a secret.

Here the reasons for the theory.

Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 1.25

He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 1.34

And sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 1.44

But he sternly order them not make him known. 3.12

He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. 5.43

Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 7.36

He asked the, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."
And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 8.29-30

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 9.9

He didn't want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 9.30-31

From these passages we get the idea of the “messianic secret.” It is as if Jesus is trying to conceal who he is. He wants it to be a secret.

Given the Christian penchant for proclaiming, telling anyone who will listen about Jesus, this desire for secrecy has caused much consternation. While there are a number of theories as to why Jesus said, “tell no one,” I will offer one that fits with our theory of confronting the cosmic Jesus.

It could be that during the first generation after Jesus the church began to gain great confidence about what they believed. It could be that the church was splintering, dividing into factions, over what they believed about Jesus. On numerous occasions the Apostle Paul describes a church in tatters arguing with itself about who Jesus is. It could be that Mark’s account takes this to heart. It could be that the demand for silence is a type of rebuke. We need to be humble in silence more than we need to be sure in our proclamation.

Why Mark wrote his gospel the way he did is a matter of choice. Remember the claim of Luke about creating an orderly account and the claim of John regarding many, many experiences that could have been recorded or accounted. Mark chose 90 pieces. There is no explicit need to record that Jesus demanded silence, that he ordered secrecy. The messianic secrecy doesn’t move the story forward. The controversies moved the story of Jesus’ life as remembered by Peter because they explain the violence Jesus endured on the cross. But the secrets don’t explain anything really.

The demand of secrecy though does point to a failure. Jesus fails to control people and the people fail to follow Jesus. Having pastored churches for 25 years I would say that is still pretty much the case. The living resurrected Christ for whom we await and pray, “come Lord Jesus,” this Jesus doesn’t control the church. And the ones who believe, who are called to live lives worthy of the gospel . . . well . . . there is a bit of failure there too. Just a bit.

As we will see in the final attribute of Mark to be considered for our theory, failure is key to Peter’s memory. Perhaps we are more certain “about” Jesus than we are able to follow Jesus. Perhaps we need to find more strength in silence than in proclamation. Perhaps.

Rebukes and Failures

There are many more than four attributes which define the Gospel of Mark. I have chosen four to suggest that these will help you hear the gospel as the living memory of Peter that was crafted in preaching and accounted for by Mark. Perhaps the most important feature is that Peter remembers a lot of failure and being rebuked by Jesus because the apostles just didn’t understand.

Read over the passages following. Each one is a moment of frustration, of rebuke, a moment where the disciples, the Pharisees, the people just were not able to be faithful.

- Jesus looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart. 3.5

- Jesus answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I put up with you?” 9.19
- But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said them, “let the little come to me.” 10.14
- And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 4.13
- Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 4.40
- When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they saw him and were terrified. 6.50
- “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites.” 7.6
- Then Jesus said to them, “do you not yet understand?” 8.17
- He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan!”8.33
- A loud voice came from the cloud, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 9.7
- They didn’t understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. 9.32
- They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 10.26
- When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 10.41
- Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her?” 14.6
- Judas . . . one of the twelve went to the chief priests . . . to betray him. 14.10
- Could you not keep awake for an hour? 14.37
- They all deserted him. 14.50
- I don’t know or understand what you are talking about. . . . Again he denied it. . . . I don’t know this man. 14.66-72

Perhaps the most important ones are the last two. After three years of walking with Jesus, they all deserted him. After being called the “rock upon which I build my church,” Peter says, “I don’t know this man.” This is the end of the gospel accounted by Peter. The end is a terrible failure: desertion and denial.

In our theory, it is Jesus that is too cosmic. Yet, it could also be that the church was also in need of redefinition. Consider the moment when someone wants to make a point by telling you a story. The story describes people who just doesn't get it; the story details people who are a failures; and, ultimately, the story ends with someone who betrays the one who is good and another who says, "I just don't know him." At the end of hearing this story, it may be that you wonder, "Why did you tell me this story? Do you think I don't get it? Do you see me as a failure? When have I betrayed you or denied you or anyone for that matter?"

If Mark wrote his gospel as Eusebius contends, at the request of the believers in Rome, then the believers in Rome may have gotten more than what they asked for. The disciples of Jesus become apostles and thus leaders of the church are not seen as heroes of the faith in Mark. They look bad; they look like idiots. More often than not, they simply just don't get it.

If we were take Mark as a moment of generational challenge, then Mark is telling the first generation, maybe you still don't get it.

A Gospel Without an Ending

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

No other part of the Gospel of Mark has greater potential for confusion and controversy than what is known as "the shorter ending." Mark ends his gospel with a cliff hanger: "terror and amazement seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Jesus is alive; he is gone ahead of you to Galilee! He is risen! He is risen indeed! The women rushed back and told the eleven what they saw and they went straightaway to Galilee. That is the ending one would expect on Easter. Except no gospel records it this way. Matthew gets close in that the disciples actually end up in Galilee believing in the resurrection. Mark has silence and fear; Luke has the disciples staying in Jerusalem. In John the disciples return to Galilee, but they are disillusioned and getting on with life (they returned to their nets). Only in the letters of Paul do we get a sense that the resurrection was a success.

In the memory of Peter the resurrection was not told as a moment of success. The resurrection was frightening and confusion and everything that would not imply confidence. For me, this is the key to hearing Jesus in Mark. In order to listen you need to be silent; in order to listen you need to perceive your lack of understanding; in order to listen you need to lay aside surety and take up humility.

Kierkegaard wrote, "In the eyes of God you are always in the wrong." Not a cheery note, but certainly one that causes the pause of humility. Mark is going fast. Everything happens immediately. The last three years of the life of Jesus were filled with controversies and danger. Jesus was not in control and people were not able to follow his directions. In the end, the disciples were far from heroic champions of the faith. Often times they looked terribly foolish. Why would Mark record the memories of Peter in such a fashion? Why would paint such an earthly picture of Jesus and such a harsh description of the disciples?

How we answer that is how we listen to the gospel of Mark.