

I'm a big fan of Mark's Gospel. I like the way his Gospel is short and to the point. Either it's because he wrote down the preaching of St. Peter - who was a no-nonsense fisherman - or because he had the same writing teacher that I had back in business school. But today, let's focus on Mark's headline: "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.*"

What a great headline. The first verse of this gospel serves as its title. Mark pulls no punches. He sets out from the very beginning to get in the face of the Roman rulers of his world and to get noticed by his Jewish brothers and sisters when he uses these three words and phrases: **Gospel, Christ and Son of God.**

Mark's **Gospel** is now considered to be the first Gospel written. So his use of the word Gospel is an original part of his headline. It grabbed people because that word Gospel belonged to the Roman Emperor. Trademarked. Copyrighted.

"Gospel" is the English version of a Greek word *euangelion* usually translated as 'good news.' How is that "in your face" to the Emperor?" It sounds more like a line of Hallmark greeting cards – to us. But back in Mark's day, the words "good news" were properly used only in the vocabulary of the Roman Emperors, who saw themselves as saviors and redeemers of the world. Messages issued by the emperors were called "good news" regardless of whether their content was particularly cheerful or pleasant. It could be the latest press release about some new building project or news of a great victory out on the frontier. Good News from the Emperor was supposed to be a change of the world for the better.

An ancient inscription from the Roman Empire dated about nine years before Jesus was about the birth of Caesar Augustus. It uses the exact same language that Mark's Gospel uses. The announcement was good news of the birth of Caesar, who wasn't just regarded as a king but also as a savior and even as a god.

The Gospel of Mark is believed to have been written for Christians living in Rome. They would have been very familiar with the Roman Emperor. So when Mark adopts that word *euangelion*, what he is telling us is this: The Roman Emperors pretend to be gods, but the real God, the God who can save the world, is Jesus, not the Emperor. Either you are going to accept the good news of the divine Caesar and accept him as your god, or you are going to accept the good news of Jesus, the savior and son of God, who made the heavens and earth.

Mark's headline immediately establishes Jesus' identity when he calls him the "Christ" and the "Son of God." **Christ** is a Greek word describing "an anointed royal person." The Hebrew equivalent is Messiah - the one destined to deliver Israel from their trials and tribulations. Naming Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, was a bold assertion.

For Mark to call Jesus the **Son of God** to was beyond bold - it went far beyond the normal expectations of a messiah. Mark's first century Jewish community expected a Moses-like leader; they got Jesus of Nazareth. So they heard a headline that was tough to understand. Romans hearing Mark's headline had an even tougher time, since the only one worthy to be called the Son of God was the Roman Emperor. So we have another "in-your-face" phrase built into Mark's headline.

At the time Mark wrote, the Good News was beginning to explode in the Mediterranean world. The apostles and other Christians traveled throughout the empire telling the story of Jesus in synagogues and town squares. Lives were being changed as people who had been lost in spiritual darkness and moral confusion came to know this person Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and they came to experience his love. They learned that God sent his Son Jesus to walk in our shoes, to be one with the human race, to show us the face of his Father.

So what do these three words and phrases: Gospel, Christ and Son of God have to do with us in our everyday life? We are here at Church because we believe that Good News is not from the White House, Good News is not from the latest pillow or bedsheets, Good News is not from saving 15% on your car insurance. The Good News is that God is with us in the person of Jesus, even now, who is completely one with the human race and all of our hopes, dreams, distractions and disappointments. The person who is here for us as people who know spiritual darkness and moral confusion.

The Good News is that Jesus gives us Baptism and Confession to forgive all of our screw-ups, our failures and our breakdowns. And Jesus gives us his Church to continue to provide ways to get back together with him - to sort things out - for forgiveness, for a relationship and for worship.

The Good News is that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah - the one who can deliver us from our own out-of-control egos, the grinding rule of our own out-of-control government, and the endless bombardment by the atheistic culture surrounding us, and our many trials and tribulations that result.

The Good News is that God does walk with us as the person we call Jesus - who is the Christ, who sets us free to live as God intended. And Jesus is the Son of God who shows at every celebration of the Eucharist how much love the Father has for us. Knowing that is enough to change your life.

I want for you what Mark would want - to live your life differently because of three words and phrases: **Gospel, Christ and Son of God.**

Amen?

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