

Introductory Comments

1. Chapters 6-10 continue to put into sharper relief the four basic types of responses to the word in the Parable of the Sower (4 Earths), particularly the responses representing the rocky ground and the good earth (this is because these two responses are most easily confused due to the fact that the rocky ground starts so positively). As we work our way through these chapters, more details will emerge as to what separates fearful from faithful responses.
2. Two major sections focus on two types of “bad soil” (rocky and thorny) from here until the Passion narrative. Mark 6:1-8:21 and 8:22-10:52. Our focus will be the first section in the coming weeks – 6:1-8:21. Surrounded by the two stories of the feeding of the multitudes with their respective boat trip conclusions, this section depicts the shift of the disciples from acceptance to hard-heartedness, from possible faith to fear.
3. Outline of Section 6:1-8:21
 - 6:1-34
 - 6:1-6 – rejected by neighbors; family named
 - 6:7-13, 30 – calls and sends out the Twelve
 - [6:14-29 – death of John the Baptist by Herod]
 - 6:31-34 – by boat to lonely place, crowds from all towns, teaching
 - 6:35-52
 - 6:35-44 – feeding of five thousand
 - 6:45-52 – walking on water; disciples’ hearts hardened
 - 6:53-7:37
 - 6:53-56 – general healing; immediately recognized
 - 7:1-23 – inner heart vs. outer tradition
 - vv. 1-13 – controversy with scribes over heart vs show
 - vv. 14-15 – teaching to crowd on inner vs outer uncleanness
 - vv.17-23 – repetition to disciples of inner vs outer
 - 7:24-30 – healing of Syrophenician woman’s daughter
 - 7:31-37 – healing of deaf mute
 - 8:1-21
 - 8:1-10 – feeding of four thousand
 - 8:11-21
 - vv. 11-13 – Pharisees demand a sign
 - vv. 14-21 – boat trip; disciples do not understand

Questions and Read Mark 6

Discussion Questions

1. What are some differences between the disciples and those that are healed? How does this relate to 6:1-6? *It's not about being blood relations or having a privileged position – those who have faith are members of Jesus' family. Moreover, this first story clarifies fully the connection between faith and Jesus' mighty works. Because the people of his hometown rejected him as Mary's son and the brother of James and Joses and others, they lacked faith (6:6), and Jesus "could do no mighty work there" (6:5a). Mighty works are the result of the interaction of Jesus and people of faith. Without the faith of the people, Jesus cannot bring forth fruit.*

2. There are significant connections between the stories of 6:1-34 and 3:7-35 (notwithstanding the story of Herod and John the Baptist). Can you spot them? *Mark 6:1-34 reprises in inverted order the three episodes of 3:7-35 (3:7-12 – by the sea, crowds from many towns, boat, healing; 3:13-19a – calls and appoints the Twelve; 3:19b-35 – controversy with those "near him" and scribes, rejects old family). Now the question is, why? The reprise occurs after Parable of Four Earths, so by now hearer has a whole different orientation to the narrative and the characters in it. It's akin to a "youth symphony" where a group of kids is brought to a symphony, but instead of just listening to each piece, the conductor explains what to listen for.*

3. Why is the Herod story (6:14-29) put right in the middle of the disciples' mission story? *This insertion overshadows disciples and undercuts their positive mission; also, when Mark does this, he is somehow linking the two stories he mixes. In this case, he is drawing the attention of his audience to the just-learned fact that those of the "rocky ground" type will stumble when tribulation or persecution arises. This is brilliant foreshadowing of the graphic nature of those tribulations, second only to the crucifixion itself.*

4. What else does the Herod story represent? (6:17-26) *It illustrates the capriciousness and omnipresence of evil. It also links Herod to the disciples and Jesus in that the very success of their work was responsible for bringing them to Herod's deadly attention. **What type of ground is Herod?** He is as thorny as they come.*

5. After the successful interactions with people in 6:13 (casting out demons, anointing and healing the sick), how do the disciples fare when they go with Jesus to the deserted place and feed the 5000? *Not well. They exhibit a lack of faith as they go literal in their question about how to feed the people.*

6. The feeding story is followed immediately by another boat story – this time Jesus “walking on water” (6:49-51). What similarities do you find between this story and the stilling of the storm story in 4:35-41? Have the disciples progressed in their understanding of Jesus? *Once again, the disciples are in the boat, out at sea, and the weather is rough. Jesus comes to them, demonstrating his mastery over even the chaos of the sea as he walks on water, and yet, the disciples are terrified, thinking him to be a ghost. He can overcome the chaos of nature but not the disciples’ faithlessness. They just don’t get it, and their hearts are hardened. Who else was said to have “hardened hearts? The Pharisees!*

7. What is the impact on the audience of the healing summary (6:53-56) that follows the “walking on water” story? *While the disciples don’t seem able to recognize Jesus’ power and demonstrate faith, the crowds that Jesus encounters can. They see him and know who he is; they experience healing as they simply touch him with faith. Where the disciples miss it, the crowds “get it.” The healing summary demonstrates (as do the earlier healings) that those who have faith in Jesus’ power are healed with ease.*

****For next session, read Mark 7*