

9am Christian Learning, April 26, 2020 —The Reverend Margaret Schwarzer Meeting God in Mark by Rowan Williams – Chapter Two

Chapter Two: Telling Secrets

Recap

In Chapter One, Williams asserts that Mark has two challenges for us (his readers):

- 1) Can you let yourself be addressed by the central figure?
Can you stand with Mark as a relationship with Jesus shapes both of you?
- 2) Can you enter into the “regime change” this story is about?
Can you live in a world where “God is taking over?”

Telling Secrets

Another important theme in Mark’s gospel is the theme of secrecy. Jesus is always telling people NOT to tell anyone about his miracles, or his healings, or his parables, or the truth about who he (Jesus) is. Jesus “does not allow the demons to speak because they knew him” when Jesus exorcises evil spirits. (Mark 1:34) When he heals a leper, Jesus says, “Take care to say nothing to anyone.” (Mark 1:44)

It is also true that in Jesus’ day, there were plenty of people who claimed to be exorcists, miracle workers, and healers. Charismatic healers were common in Jesus’ time.

Why do you think Jesus would not want people to tell others about his miracles or his healings? (See pages 29-36)

The First Big Secret

Williams reminds us of the story about a deeply saintly priest and the angel:

“A deeply saintly priest was praying with a young novice when she opened her eyes in the middle of prayer and saw an angel standing by them. “Look Father, there is an angel!”, the young woman said. “Nonsense, Sister, go back to your prayers,” said the priest. A few days later, rather sheepishly, the young woman said to the priest, “I’m sorry, Father, but there really was an angel there you know.” “Of course, there was,” he said, “Saw it myself. So what?” (Page 39-40)

What does this story tell us about the first big secret about Jesus Christ?

Williams: “The God who is going to change everything, change for ever the conditions in which human beings live, is a God who is beyond power as we would like to understand it; a God who does not coerce belief or clinch arguments, but who repeatedly demands relationship and trust....” “The God who will forgive sins and release people from guilt and fear (does not do things) by event(s) of naked power.” (p 39- p.40)

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The Second Big Secret

The disciples in Mark are notoriously mistaken and confused about who Jesus is and what he does. Many scholars have remarked upon how Mark's story shows how "stupid" the disciples are. They often miss Jesus' point, or misunderstand him. Even when Jesus show them and tells them again and again... they still don't get it. (This secret is big enough that it will take time for them, and for each of us, to find it and accept it.)

Jesus chooses to communicate in ways that are metaphorical and mysterious. Mark records how Jesus uses parables – comparisons – to explain what the Kingdom of God is. These parables do not have "clear and simple words." (p.45) Why does Jesus do that?

"Mark is like a long koan." (P. 46)

The second big secret in Mark is that God and Jesus are not interested in proving their existence; they are interested in teaching us how to love with the fullness of divine intention. (in Greek, the word for this is "agape" which loosely translates as "selfless love which brings abundance.")

Rowan Williams says, "God does not worry about demonstrating his existence to us; our problem is not that we do not know, but that we cannot love. God habitually works – so to speak- 'outwards' from the heart of being, steadily expanding the scope of his actions through the actions of the beings he has created. ...God is transforming the world, healing its wounds and forgiving and overcoming failures by being with and in the process of the world – above all in that unique process that is human life: the life first of Jesus, but then the lives of those who have been called and commissioned to be- like him and because of him- places where the work of God can start to expand and blossom in this world." (p. 43)

The Power of the Gospel

Williams points out that many scholars believe *Mark* was written to a new church community that was "perhaps a bit too in love with wonderworking and success, a Church that puts too much store in tangible signs of God's favor and assistance." (p. 46)

He also confirms that other scholars "have suggested that *Mark* is writing for a Church baffled and fearful because the signs won't come thick and fast enough. What is coming fast is persecution and a sense of threat and failure. Mark is writing into the life of communities experiencing fear and disorientation." (p. 46)

Do you agree with Williams?

Is our current pandemic beginning to change the way we may read *Mark*, or understand God?