

Bible Studies at the Anglican Consultative Council

Mark – God’s Gospel of Mystery and Mission

A regular feature of the timetable at the forthcoming ACC meeting will be Bible Studies. For each Bible Study there will be a presentation of 10-15 minutes, followed by discussion in small groups of about 8 people. Written notes and questions relating to the text being explored will be available each day. The Bible Study will conclude with a prayer, and on some occasions also a song.

We thought it might be helpful to share with you in advance the ‘vision’ for these Bible Studies. We will be studying the Gospel of Mark. Our hope is, that through the Bible Studies, we will be able to gain a sense of Mark’s Gospel as a whole, from its beginning to end. With that in mind, as well as using Mark to provide the passages for our Studies, we will be using Mark as the Gospel/New Testament reading during most of the acts of worship at ACC. So we will be travelling with Mark through the story of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection. We will discover how each part of the Gospel cannot be fully understood unless it is read in the light of the rest, so, for example, Jesus’ passion casts its shadow back into the early pages of Mark’s story, while the resurrection light illuminates both Jesus’ ministry and his death. Also importantly, we will explore how Mark is not simply telling us what Jesus said and did as matter of past history; he is also concerned to make it clear what this means for Jesus’ disciples or ‘followers’ (‘Follow’ is one of Mark’s favourite words.)

Why have we chosen to use Mark as the Gospel for these Bible Studies? There are a number of reasons. Partly because it is the Gospel we are using in the Revised Common Lectionary throughout most of 2009. This is the Lectionary used by many (though not all) of the Churches of the Anglican Communion. Partly because Mark is the shortest of the Gospels – so it is perhaps the easiest to get a sense of the ‘whole story’ during the twelve days of the ACC meeting. Mark is also generally thought to be the earliest of the Gospels, so in studying Mark we are digging very deep into the early Church’s experience of Jesus. As one modern writer puts it, ‘Most of the New Testament is poetry born of the terror, joy and controversy springing from encounter with God through Jesus’ (*Christopher Burdon*) – and in Mark’s Gospel that encounter seems exceptionally vivid. Partly too because Mark is pre-eminently a missionary Gospel: Mark makes it transparently clear that the mission of Jesus does not come to an end with Jesus’ death and resurrection, and it is for us to carry on this mission of Jesus in our day, following the pattern that Jesus himself has modelled for us. What does Mark’s Gospel have to say to the Anglican Communion, as we seek, at this meeting, to enable ourselves to participate in the Christ-like mission of God for the 21st century?

We will be asking members of ACC to share stories from their particular contexts that can illuminate the passages that we will be studying. Partly with that in mind you might like to prepare yourself for ACC 14 by reading through the Gospel of Mark before you come to Jamaica. It would also be helpful if you can bring a copy of the Bible in the language with which you feel most comfortable. The journey we will be taking together, with Mark, will be exhilarating, mysterious, challenging. It will certainly recall us, as Anglican Christians, to our biblical roots, and help us discover how serious study is ‘crucial’ (literally) for the life and health of our Communion today.

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