

## **THERE WERE *OTHER BOATS* TOO: A NOTE ON MARK 4:36'S CONTRIBUTION TO JESUS' IDENTITY IN MARK'S GOSPEL**

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### **Abstract**

*What is the significance of Mark's mentioning other boats in the stilling of the storm incident? Could this notion of 'other boats' be Mark's deliberate intimation of Jesus' consistent awareness of and openness to 'others' in the Christian community's vicinity? This article answers the latter question in the affirmative. It is asserted that Mark's mentioning of the other boats is in keeping with the Markan Jesus' outlook, as well as with what he expects of his followers. This conclusion emerges, not from the author's expertise in Markan scholarship, but from a bringing together of insights from diverse engagements with Mark, an exercise inspired by the conviction that every sub-discipline concerned with the study of the New Testament contributes to the overall meaningfulness of the text.*

**Key Words:** Gospels; Mark 4:36; Jesus' Identity; Jesus' Mission; Inclusion; Others

### **Introduction**

*The Gospel according to Mark*<sup>1</sup> presents Capernaum as the base of Jesus' ministry (e.g. 2:1, cf. 1:21, 29). At least two historical factors made it, for Mark, a more fitting setting for Jesus' mission than Jesus' purported hometown, the hilly Nazareth (1:9). First, Capernaum was home to at least some of Jesus' closest followers (e.g. 1:29). Secondly, the nearby lake was a hub of activity and in many ways the place to be for those who sought to transform their society where significant impact was feasible. Mark characterises this life-enabling mass of water as the *Sea of Galilee* (1:16 *et al.*):

By making the sea his narrative center of gravity in the first half of the story, Mark was indeed reflecting the fact that the lake in fact lay at the heart of life in eastern Galilee. It determined the attractive climate of the region, enabling agriculture, tourism, and urban growth around its shores, as well as the all-important fishing industry; its fierce and sudden storms were also well known. His Palestinian audience was all too familiar with the omnipresence of dispossessed crowds, and above all the structures of segregation between Jew and gentile (Myers 2008:230-1).

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<sup>1</sup> Mark's Gospel is afforded priority in keeping with current scholarly near-consensus. Some of the pertinent presuppositions include: (i) Mark is the *earliest* among the canonical gospels, (ii) while composing their own gospels, Matthew and Luke had access to *some version* of Mark (John's Gospel is a special kettle of fish), and (iii) Mark's Gospel in its present form (but without the longer ending) is a coherent literary unit that conveys a discernible Markan perspective of the good news as performed by Jesus the Christ.

Crowds comprising both the dispossessed and the merely curious would gather by the bustling lake to hear the Markan Jesus teach (e.g. 2:13).<sup>2</sup> The crowd would at times get so big that Jesus needed to teach from within the safe space of a boat (e.g. 3:9; 4:1). Jesus' specifying the desired boat's size in 3:9 is flatly indicative of his group's access to several boats. Mark takes this for granted; after all, Jesus' inner circle included persons who used to cast nets for a living (e.g. 1:16-20). In addition to ensuring safety from interested throngs, however, the boat also served as vehicle for extending Jesus' mission beyond familiar faces and places, even beyond the structures of segregation between Jew and gentile as this article argues. That Jesus and his followers would transition by boat from one location to another around the Lake of Galilee (e.g. 5:21; 6:45, 53; 8:10, 13) is so mundane that some early copyists saw no need to explicate it.<sup>3</sup>

Such transitioning from one side of the lake to another was not always a straightforward affair; sometimes the lake reared its fierce and sudden storms. Memories of eventful crossings become easier to preserve and propagate than memories from days when the lake was quiet and welcoming. Likewise, stories of drama at sea are not so hard for creative minds to develop in order to convey some or other point to an interested audience. *Geostorm* is the latest case in point of such instalments by Hollywood. As Punt (2014) argues, imperialistic and/or revolutionary themes tend to dominate such creations.

In other words, it is irrelevant whether the stilling of the storm narrated in 4:35-41 is historical fact; it is sufficient that it has an historical basis, i.e. it was credible from the perspective of those who experienced it. As a non-eyewitness, Mark worked creatively with what he had received from those who in hortative contexts had ever so eloquently recalled stories wherein they starred alongside Jesus. The stories were evoked for what they conveyed about what the resurrected Saviour meant (or needed to mean) to the respective audiences. Mark too, as author, knit together these stories into a cohesive proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God (1:1). Ascription of coherence to Mark as author makes it possible to appreciate the place of the stilling of the storm story (4:35-41) within the larger innovative opus that is Mark's Gospel; Mark was "the first to tell the story of Jesus *in writing*" (Borg 2011:2, emphasis original).<sup>4</sup>

Among the unique features of Mark's version of said story, this article wrestles only its mention of the presence of 'other boats' from the perspective that this reference is consistent with the earliest gospel's mission to persuade its hearers/readers about the importance for the Christian community of an inclusivist understanding of God's Rule as launched by Jesus. A brief recapitulation of the story's salient aspects precedes a review of conceivable explanations for this odd reference to *other boats* before a proposal is put forward of what these *other boats* can mean within Mark's scheme.

<sup>2</sup> Except when otherwise qualified, all references to Jesus in this article are to Jesus as remembered by Mark the evangelist. Each gospel remembers Jesus in its own way, against the backdrop of Jesus' resurrection on the one hand and, on the other, with the circumstances of its primary audience in mind, not neglecting the author's own inclinations. Put differently, in this article, literary/narrative considerations trump historical concerns; Elliott's apologia for the value of narrative criticism (2011:5-19) is useful.

<sup>3</sup> Manuscripts D, Θ, P<sup>45</sup>, [HMD: hierdie soort verwysing is na dokumente wat ek en jy nie het nie, soos Qumran? ens., aanvaar maar net soos dit hier staan.] *etc.* omit 'by boat' in 5:21, for instance.

<sup>4</sup> Or, in more colourful parlance, "Mark was the first to impose on the pluralistic and charismatic tradition of the oral transmission the more reflective and harmonious modes of conceptualisation that come with the world of writing" (Botha 1990:53, summarising Werner Kelber's appreciation of the earliest gospel).

## **The Stilling of the Storm: A Brief Synopsis**

All three Synoptic Gospels bear witness to the stilling of the storm story (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25), an indication that Matthew and Luke got the story from their mutual source, Mark. At the same time, it is not hard to imagine that this story would have been popular and widespread among the earliest Christian communities.<sup>5</sup> The rich symbols with which it is imbued keep it alive in believers' minds to this very day, and not in any rigid sense; my favourite James Cleveland song begins thus: *Master, the tempest is raging!* This story's charm must have a lot to do, on the one hand, with the primordial status of the metaphor of the sea as a hostile threat representing "powers of chaos and evil that struggle against God" (Harrington 2001:606),<sup>6</sup> and on the other with the early Christian community's self-understanding as a boat on such a sea.<sup>7</sup>

The conviction that each evangelist brings to the task of authorship a specific theological agenda<sup>8</sup> that informs which stories are selected as well as how they get redacted calls for a comparison of the Synoptic versions of the stilling of the storm episode. Each account offers a window into each evangelist's authorial skills, motives and interests. Hence, for example, the disquieted disciples address Jesus in different ways in the storm-stilling story: as *Διδάσκαλε* (Teacher) in Mark, as *Κύριε* (Lord) in Matthew, and for Luke as *Ἐπιστάτα* (Master). Each of these forms of address carries significant weight within the narrative framework of each gospel and its community of production.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the care which each Synoptist takes when using such titles is remarkable.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding the intractable distance between the worldviews of modern and ancient hearers (and authors), the synopsis affords us clues into what each evangelist's community would have valued about this story, as well as how we today may benefit from such uses given our modern-day circumstances.

Four direct speech units constitute the core of the stilling of the storm story. As Table 1 indicates, and while following the main sequence, each evangelist articulates these statements in line with his own narrative purpose and style. Thus, for instance, Matthew renders as indirect speech the initial instruction to cross the sea. Both Luke and Matthew do not even express the second statement as a question! Furthermore, Luke finds "Why are you

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<sup>5</sup> Its constant oral performance may even have ensured that "the Gospel texts are much closer to the form in which the eyewitnesses told their stories or passed on their traditions" (Bauckham 2006:6).

<sup>6</sup> "There is evidence in both Greek and Jewish literature, early and late, for the personification or demonisation of wind and sea" (Collins, 2007:261).

<sup>7</sup> For example, it stands out that for Mark the incidents reported in 4:35-41 and 6:46-52 – the two miracles involving the sea – are "the only two miracles from which the disciples benefit" directly. Clearly, *for Mark* "Christ comes to the assistance of the community ... Jesus then delivers the church from its trials" (Best 1981:232).

<sup>8</sup> Why else would Luke have gone through the trouble of writing yet another Jesus story if, as he was aware (Luke 1:1-4) that many others had already undertaken 'orderly accounts' of the same? Fortunately, Luke's prologue ably declares his reasons for producing one more Jesus account. Not only were Luke's goals sufficiently unique to him and his circumstances, they also thus coloured his retelling of the things about which Theophilus had already had some instruction.

<sup>9</sup> It is significant that this is the first time in Mark that Jesus is called *Teacher*. "This story, by initiating the vocabulary, establishes the interpretive lens through which Mark's understanding of Jesus as a teacher should be viewed. It is a lens of inclusive politics" (Blount 2016:184). As Teacher, Jesus "instructs by enacting a way to be emulated" (2016:185). It entails "a certain way of being, a way of breaking down the divisive barriers and boundaries that put some on the outside and some on the inside" (2016:187).

<sup>10</sup> So meticulous are the evangelists that "There is little irrelevant detail in the gospel narratives. Most details are significant for narrative or theological reasons" (Bauckham 2006:343).

afraid?” redundant when placed alongside “Where is your faith?” Is not the presence of fear indicative of the absence of faith, and *vice versa*?

<b>Matthew 8:18-27</b>	<b>Mark 4:35-41</b>	<b>Luke 8:22-25</b>
<i>He gave orders to go over to the other side (v.18)</i>	<i>Let us go across to the other side (v.35)</i>	<i>Let us go across to the other side of the lake (v.22)</i>
<i>Lord, save us! We are perishing! (v.25)</i>	<i>Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? (v.38)</i>	<i>Master, Master, we are perishing! (v.24)</i>
<i>Why are you afraid, you of little faith? (v.26)</i>	<i>Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith? (v.40)</i>	----- <i>Where is your faith? (v.25)</i>
<i>What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him? (v.27)</i>	<i>Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? (v.41)</i>	<i>Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him? (v.25)</i>

Table 1: Core Elements of the Stilling of the Storm Story (NRSV)

The Matthean pericope falls within a series of nine miracles (Matthew 8-9) that follows immediately after the famous teaching on the mount (Matthew 5-7). The disciples follow Jesus into the boat. He takes the lead after his earlier directive to cross the lake (8:18) was discourteously delayed by queries first from a scribe and then from a disciple; both characters wanted to follow Jesus but had things keeping them back (8:19-22). The Matthean Jesus’ responses to both persons serve as a fitting preface to the stilling of the storm story through which Matthew seeks to answer *the people’s* (not exclusively the disciples’) question: “What sort of man is this?” (8:27). Little wonder then that, for Matthew, Jesus *first* rebukes his followers (who should know better than the *hoi polloi*) for their lack of faith before going on to rebuke the wind and the sea (8:26)! Why be afraid of the natural elements while you are with the one you recognise to be the *Lord*?

Unlike Matthew, Luke preserves Mark’s biographical setting for the story, but not without tidying up Mark. Hence, for instance, he lets Jesus first fall asleep before mentioning the storm (8:23), a development that in Mark appears to be somewhat of an afterthought. He also softens Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples, omitting the belabouring “Why are you afraid?” (8:25) just as he omitted the Markan disciples’ brusque probe, namely, “Don’t you care?” (8:24). Luke speaks more accurately about the *Lake of Galilee* (8:22-23).<sup>11</sup> He even objects to Mark’s implausible suggestion that everything recorded in Chapter 4 had transpired in one very long and eventful day for Jesus and the disciples; for Luke the stilling of the storm incident simply occurred ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν (“on one of the days”, 8:22).

The various accentuations of the story by each evangelist are fascinating. Matthew and Luke do a lot with the story, in terser terms, and with their primary audiences foremost in mind. Notwithstanding all valid hindrances, their creativity transports us back in time armed with clues that enable us to feel meaningfully addressed. But their creativity was

<sup>11</sup> “But, in actuality, the so-called Sea of Galilee is a lake – a large, inland, fresh-water lake. The use of *thalassa*, ‘sea,’ instead of the more precise *limne*, ‘lake,’ has been characterised by Matthew Black as thoroughly Semitic. Whatever the motivation for the choice of *thalassa*, the term serves in Mark with richer scriptural connotations and as a more significant contrast to ‘land’ or ‘earth’ than would ‘lake’” (Malbon 1984:364).

facilitated in part by their access to (some version of) Mark as a source that they could reshape at leisure. In view of his pioneering role in this regard, it is thus necessary to pay due regard to Mark's version of events in its own right.

Mark pours so much into this story that his lengthier version remains intriguingly unique. He asserts, for instance, the very words Jesus used to rebuke the wind: "Peace! Be still!" (4:39); this command becomes significant when its parallels are brought into play (e.g. 1:25). He insists on detail such as when the incident occurred: "On that day, when evening had come" (4:35), in this way asserting a connection between this episode and the many events related prior to it, beginning at 4:1. In addition to the symbolism associated with evening, the onset of darkness, the hectic day reasonably justifies Jesus' capacity to sleep soundly amid the storm (4:38). Mark evidently tells this story "in terms that allude to passages in the Hebrew Bible about God's subjugation of the waters of chaos," the goal being to "place the story in a wider symbolic field of resonance." The question regarding Jesus' identity asked by the disciples at the end of the scene becomes inevitable, therefore, because "for Mark's contemporaries the danger of a storm at sea really was an instantiation of the destructive forces of nature symbolised by the waters of chaos in Jewish cosmology" (Bauckham 2006:504).

<p>καὶ ἀφέντες τὸν ὄχλον  παραλαμβάνουσιν αὐτὸν ὡς ἦν ἐν τῷ  πλοίῳ,  καὶ ἄλλα πλοῖα ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ.</p>	<p><i>And having left behind the crowd  They took him as he was in the boat,  And other boats there were with him.</i></p>
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Table 2: Mark 4:36

Of equal significance for the Markan Jesus' identity,<sup>12</sup> but scarcely appreciated as such by commentators, is the third of Mark 4:36's awkward sentences (Table 2); so awkward are they that Matthew and Luke both simply ignore their predecessor at this point. The listener is informed that a crowd was left behind,<sup>13</sup> that Jesus was taken by his disciples just as he was (supposedly without a moment to freshen up) in the boat,<sup>14</sup> and that other boats were in the picture as well. The first two claims have received adequate attention from scholars, even if their efforts often end up being "just as awkward" (Blount 2016:191). The article now turns to the matter of the presence of *other boats*, with the hope of affording the reader more light than obfuscation.

<sup>12</sup> Elliott's critique (2011:18) is pertinent that "New Testament critics" are "caught up" in an unconquerable "struggle for Jesus' identity" in historical perspective only to end up with representations in their own respective images and likenesses of that "one of the most powerful literary figures ever represented in narrative." But in the present instance, the pericope itself raises explicit questions about Jesus' identity.

<sup>13</sup> On the role of the crowds for Mark's narrative, see, for example, Meier (1994:21-30).

<sup>14</sup> As with the reference to the crowd, the intended connection is with 4:1 where Jesus separated himself from the crowd by means of a boat. Conversely, "the mention of the boat in 4:1 may be editorial, in order to reconcile the setting in chapter 4 with 4:36" (Marcus 1986:14). Either way, so far as Mark is concerned, the storm incident occurred on the evening of that very long day.

## Regarding the Other Boats

Considering how odd verse 36's third sentence is, it is remarkable how many commentators sidestep it *via* a sentence or two.<sup>15</sup> Granting that it is impossible to address in detail every element of Mark's Gospel without distracting from one's own agenda, some commentators nevertheless have no qualms ignoring these *other boats* altogether.<sup>16</sup> One might thus be pardoned for regarding as inconsequential this mention of the presence of *other boats* on the lake that evening. After all, on the one hand, nothing gets said about them ever again in Mark. And, on the other hand, it is common cause that there should be other boats docked or active on any living lake at any given point of time.<sup>17</sup>

Why then should Mark bring up this trivial detail? The reference to *other boats* is inconsequential, that is, unless there was more to it than inattentiveness on Mark's part; in any case, "Mark's narrative includes only what is essential to the story or adds to the effect" (Gain 1978:5). What then might have been Mark's motivation for drawing attention to these 'extras' (pun intended)? Surely it was for more than just dramatic effect! What clues can be gleaned from Mark's narrative towards explaining this odd reference?

A straightforward explanation for 4:36's *other boats* must be that they were extra carriage needed to accommodate Jesus' followers. One does well to remember that there were always more than twelve persons around or *with* Jesus. Mark 3:13-14 informed us that he appointed the twelve from a larger group of "those whom he wanted". This 'fact' is confirmed in 4:10 where Jesus affirms "those who were around him along with the twelve" to be *the insiders* (4:11). Bringing 4:34 into the equation only strengthens the argument. Mark even names, albeit much later in his narrative (15:40-41),<sup>18</sup> the several women who were part of the Jesus group from very early on, quietly playing the inimitable role, among others, of hospitality management. Surely more than a single boat was required if even half of this retinue were to cross the lake successfully.

Whether one translates μετ' αὐτοῦ as 'with him' (thereby making *Jesus* the genitive pronoun's antecedent) or as 'with it' (thereby making *the boat Jesus was in* the genitive pronoun's referent), the narrator's sense of Jesus' centrality is not diminished. Basically, the *other boats* get a mention precisely because those inside them are following Jesus too. The *other boats* are not part of the crowd that has just been dismissed; they form part of Jesus' caravan. This explanation seems consistent with the storyline, but it does not satisfy everyone since the reasonably awaited account of the fate of these other boats inexplicably escaped Mark's mind. One could stretch the point by insisting that Mark is treating the other boats as an extension of Jesus' boat in which case they would have experienced everything that the main boat experienced. But why bring them out on stage to start with?

<sup>15</sup> In his *Following Jesus, Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, the only traceable reference to the *other boats* Best (1981:231) makes is: "In v.36 ἀφέντες τὸν ὄχλον does not harmonise with the reference to other ships being with Jesus' ship; it serves to emphasise the separation of Jesus and the disciples from the crowd."

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Juel's *Augsburg Commentary on Mark* (1990) along with his *The Gospel of Mark* (1999) lack reference to the *other boats*.

<sup>17</sup> If not a cop out, the notion that Mark perhaps originally had ἄλλα δὲ πλοῖα οὐκ ἦν μετ' αὐτῶν ("there were no other boats with them") raises more problems than it solves. Why create absence where presence is reasonable? Does clearing the sea of any other potential victims of the storm really serve Mark's dramatic needs?

<sup>18</sup> "While it is strange that such constant and faithful followers of Jesus should be omitted from earlier episodes, it comes as a hopeful sign to know that some of Jesus' followers have remained true to him, especially since the twelve male disciples have proved to be such thoroughly rocky ground" (Tolbert 1998:361). It is thus reasonable to retroject some of these female disciples into the earlier episodes.

Another explanation attributes this odd detail to a subsequent mistranslation of Mark's Latin original. According to this viewpoint, "The Greek translator, not knowing that *navis* (boat) is feminine, took the masculine *multi* (many men) to refer to boats, and so wrote the neuter *πολλᾶ* (many boats), which refers back to the neuter *πλοῖον*" (Gain 1978:4-5). Consequently, *fuit in nauī, et simul multi erant cum eo* became ἦν ἐν τῷ πλοῖον, καὶ πολλὰ ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ. In this way, Mark's 'many people' regrettably metamorphosed into 'many boats'. Nevertheless, the question whether the *multi* could fit in a single boat is still not obviated.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, there remains a need to explain how and why the single Greek word *πολλᾶ* (*many boats*) evolved into the phrase ἄλλα πλοῖα (*other boats*).<sup>20</sup>

However worlds apart the above and other<sup>21</sup> proposed solutions to Mark's *other boats* may be, they all sensibly presume that there is more to the presence of *other boats* than casually meets the eye. This daring assumption is required to explain how an apparently out of place piece of information should have been preserved and transmitted, persisting in the written form of the gospel right to our times. Textual variants also are, at the very least, indications of the earliest hearers' discomfort with καὶ ἄλλα πλοῖα ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ. For instance, the Majority Text's *πλοῖάρια* ('smaller boats') makes no substantial difference to the problem at hand. If anything, it explains the necessity of more than one *extra* boat.

While "scholars resort to considering the detail to be a remnant of an earlier form of the story in which it did have significance" (Bauckham 2006:343), it is nevertheless also conceivable that Mark had deliberately related the story in this fashion. If Mark "rarely takes attention off the central figure, Jesus" (Best 1981:16), then the *other boats* have something to do with elucidating Mark's protagonist. Odd details in Mark that scholars have tended to take as remnants of eyewitness memory (e.g. Taylor 1952:272, 274) may in fact be aids to Mark's narrative goals.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps, then, the reference to *other boats* preserves for Mark a "part of the unfolding of the significance of Jesus' portrayal as 'messiah' or 'Christ' (1:1) and as God's son (1:11 and 3:11)" (Collins 2007:263). In this connection, Mark highlights the *other boats* so that those who have ears may pick up the important motif that the kingdom of God (1:15) as modelled by Jesus Christ, the son of God (1:1) is neither exclusivist nor self-absorbed. This concern for the others who largely remain unnamed and easy to ignore, who are not obvious candidates for the inner circle, is one of the reasons why the question "Who then is this?" must be posed in every conclusion to the stilling of the storm story.

<sup>19</sup> This article's line of argument obviates the need to speculate about the capacities of boats in Jesus' day.

<sup>20</sup> The Latin-original view found encouragement from the now discarded view that Mark's Gospel was composed in Rome in close association with Peter (see e.g. Incigneri 2003:102). The co-presence of both *Aramaisms* and *Latinisms* in Mark undermines their usability in settling the question of provenance.

<sup>21</sup> To indulge only a single brief survey of the rest of the proposed solutions for the presence of the *other boats*: "Bultmann concluded that this mention 'is old, and has been rendered unintelligible by the editing.' Theissen suggested that Mark has compressed a longer story in which the sinking of the other boats depicted the dangerous character of the storm. Recently, Dennis R MacDonald has argued that the narrative of the stilling of the storm was modeled on Homer's *Odyssey* ... If the miracle story is based, in part, on Ps 107:23-32 (106:23-32 LXX), however, the presence of 'other boats' may be inspired by v. 23a..." (Collins 2007:258). The art of conjecture knows no bounds.

<sup>22</sup> "Too much has sometimes been made of the vivid details in Mark's narratives as indicative of eyewitness testimony (usually Peter's). An imaginative and skilled storyteller can also write with vivid detail, and so this feature of Mark's narratives may be evidence only of his own artistry" (Bauckham 2006:54-55).

### **Who then is this? Mark's Jesus and Others**

An important clue to the *other boats*' significance is found in 4:35: *Let us go across to the other side*. "The Greek phrase used (*eis to peran*) normally means to go from the area of Palestine, which lies to the west of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, to the land lying to the east of the sea and river" (Achtemeier 2004:13). It is critical that the Markan Jesus does in Gerasa or Gedara what he has done in Capernaum, and that he does in the Decapolis as he did throughout Galilee.

"Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:38-39)

But crossing to the other side involves uncharted paths with grave implications for all concerned. The dangers entailed in extending his body (do recall that it was *the disciples* who *took Jesus* in the boat!) away from familiar terrain will surely play themselves out at sea. That the Markan community took Jesus *just as he was* is vital. It is testimony to a consciousness among them neither to dilute Jesus' revolutionary portrayal of the kingdom of God nor to clothe him in incongruous garb.<sup>23</sup> The anxieties and uncertainties evoked by cross-cultural mission (taking Jesus places) can never be allowed to water Jesus down as though he could never survive some foreign geopolitical territories.

Mark's hearers should expect no less from Jesus in foreign territories than what he is known to have done on this side of the sea. "He goes over to the Gentile side just as he *was*, a boundary breaker. Only, in this case, the boundary that he shatters is an ethnic/racial one" (Blount 2016:191). Put differently, "In crossing the sea, Jesus may also be said to cross traditional limits" (Malbon 1984:364) such as 'synagogue' as locus of teaching or 'Israel' as exclusive target of God's mission. The Markan Jesus simply does not disappoint:

Immediately upon his arrival on the other side of the sea, in the country of the Gerasenes (5:1), Jesus is met by a demoniac, presumably a Gentile, whom he heals by casting out the unclean spirits that had possessed him. After the episode Jesus crosses 'again in the boat to the other side' (5:21), where he is met by Jairus, a Jew, whose daughter he 'heals' by raising her from the dead, that is, by restoring her spirit that had departed from her. (Malbon 1984:366)

Peoples on the other side, people often identified with swine, tombs and such other defilers (5:1ff.) benefit from Jesus just as much as do groups on this side, groups represented by synagogues and such other religious familiarities. Gentiles too have a stake in the inner circle; yet, just as within Israel, some among the Gentiles will also choose to stand on the outside (compare 3:31 with 5:17 for instance). Any confusion created by Mark's geographical impreciseness results from not appreciating the significance of the act of crossing itself as being more important than the particular destination to which such crossing may lead. It does not matter where they take him, it is only imperative that they take him as he is! The liminal space represented in Mark by the turbulent sea is not to be feared or avoided. The apparent haphazardness in the progression from Capernaum to all of Galilee and ultimately to all other sides discloses an important preoccupation of the Markan Jesus, a preoccupation for the realisation of which there is need of *other boats*.

<sup>23</sup> In the dominant discourse of 'this side', the worldview out of which Jesus' earliest disciples derive, "when uncleanliness touches cleanliness, the clean thing becomes dirty. But in this new kingdom calculus, when uncleanliness comes into contact with cleanliness, the clean doesn't become dirty; the dirty washes clean" (Blount 2016:187).



**Who then is this? From Deeds to Identity**

Unlike the human characters within Mark's narrative, the hearers (readers) of this gospel enjoy access to extra information as well as the benefit of a known ending. The very opening lines of Mark's Gospel, for instance, already afford the audience a conclusion about Jesus' identity which would only dawn on some of story's characters much later (e.g. 8:29 against 1:1). Mark's early chapters invite the audience to be in the same boat with Jesus while the narrative's characters fumble about within *other boats* struggling to understand even the simplest of Jesus' actions and allusions. But from Chapter 4 onwards, the audience gets excluded too; e.g. in 4:10-12 the hearer/reader of Mark's Gospel cannot help feeling like an outsider, especially in conjunction with 4:34.<sup>24</sup> Just like the characters who have mixed fates *vis-à-vis* grasping what Jesus is about, the audience also is suddenly no longer always at an advantage.

Among both the characters and the authorial audience, therefore, only those who have ears to hear (4:9) will grasp that which is unfolding in their day. The rest of these well-meaning followers will be following Jesus too, but from within *other boats*. Role reversal is a constant feature of Mark's story, both for characters and for Markan audiences. One minute Peter is articulating a profound revelation concerning who Jesus truly is (8:29), the next minute he is being rebuked as 'Satan' (8:33). Nevertheless, while the Markan characters and audiences will keep alternating between the main and the other boats, Jesus must always be encountered as he is! Could this be the reason why scholars keep wrestling the question of Jesus' identity?

The other clue to Jesus' identity appeared earlier on in the narrative and is thus expected to be playing on the hearer's mind when listening to the stilling of the storm incident. The response of those who were at synagogue the day Jesus cast out an unclean spirit resulted in Jesus' fame reverberating through Galilee (1:28). Practically all exorcisms risked leading to Jesus' identity being exposed, but Jesus ensured that such is not the case by rebuking into silence those who were beside themselves (e.g. 1:25) as well as by teaching through parables (4:11, 34). "Quiet! Be still!" he says to the sea (4:39) exactly as he had earlier said to the unclean spirit at synagogue (1:29). The Markan Jesus' consistent refusal for demons to prematurely lay bare his identity has in part to do with shifting people's focus from the wondrous – a phenomenon not impossible for impostors to exploit – to a genuine appreciation of the revelation that in Jesus of Nazareth, the Maker of everything is walking among humans, which is to say, the Reign of God has begun. The question of his identity is thus irrepressible.

<p><b>1:27</b></p>	<p><b>4:41</b></p>
<p><i>What then is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.</i></p>	<p><i>Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?</i></p>

Those who witnessed the synagogue miracle were not *with Jesus* in the sense that the disciples are with Jesus *in the boat* at sea. So they ask from a safe distance: What is this? Is this a new doctrine? Those who are with Jesus in the boat know what this is, namely, the

<sup>24</sup> From this juncture onwards, "At best, the audience resides at the threshold between insiders and outsiders; at worst they are outsiders..." (Ahearne-Kroll 2010:723).

fulfilment of the messianic promise. Yet they cannot help wondering if this is really the one who was promised. Could he be the supreme Teacher? The former witness a miracle and strange if authoritative teaching (“What is this?”). The disciples experience an epiphany (“Who then is this?”). Are you the one who was to come? And if you are, why are you concerned about the welfare also of those who are different from us? Aren’t you supposed to have come only for us?

Jesus’ identity has not been grasped if claimed comprehension lacks the Teacher’s solemn concern for the others whom tradition designates as different, lesser, unclean, even unworthy. From very early on in his proclamation of the kingdom of God, the Markan Jesus insisted that there were always others who also needed to be affirmed by having the Gospel proclaimed to them attested by liberating them from demonic oppression (1:39). The presence of other boats with Jesus is thus not a remnant of some lost message but rather a living invitation to every disciple to take up the challenge of experiencing God’s Kingdom outside safe spaces characterised by familiarity. Mark’s Gospel is clearly “a riddle that confounds without creating despair” (Ahearne-Kroll 2010:735), one that consistently employs a “dynamic *combination* of inclusion/exclusion” in order to engender “an audience motivated to be insiders” (Ahearne-Kroll 2010:734, emphasis original), that is, to be imitators of Jesus Christ, whatever boat they may have come in.

### ***Who then is this? In Conclusion***

We have argued tortuously that Mark ensures that Jesus’ ministry among Gentiles parallels his ministry to Israel. The parallels are unmissable, and there is striking concern with Jesus’ identity on either side of the sea. Differences too are not swept under the carpet; they are just not given room to exclude others. As threats continue to attend sea-crossings, Mark’s deliberately repetitive style forces the hearer to move back and forth through the narrative, in the process getting to better grips with Jesus’ true identity.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus moves back and forth between this and the other side of the perilous sea, upon which he asserts his authority. Jesus feeds thousands on either side of the sea. Jesus heals the sick, and restores the possessed (or, rather, the oppressed) on both sides of the sea. Jesus encounters opposition on both sides of the sea, even from the unlikeliest of quarters such as his relatives on this side (3:21), or the community of the man just rescued from the legion (5:17) on the other side. Jesus shows compassion to women young and old on either side of the sea (5:21ff; 7:24ff.) The Markan Jesus, in a word, embraces what religiosity often fears to be defiling.

Following Jesus thus involves risk. This is the reason why as soon as the disciples graduate from pondering Jesus’ identity to being able confidently to answer the question “Who do you say that I am?” (8:27-30; ‘*you*’ is plural)<sup>26</sup>, Jesus *immediately begins* (8:31ff.) to teach them about the cost of discipleship. Rather than imply the absence of storms,

<sup>25</sup> “Parallelism interrupts the merely sequential flow of content through a systematic repetition that requires readers and hearers to move forth and back through the text rather than simply straight through it. Once a parallel is discerned it becomes necessary to pause, however momentarily, and synthesise the relations between the parallels before moving forward through the text. ...the parallels represent a hermeneutically significant interplay between the synchronic and diachronic display of content. Moreover, although the intervals participate only in the diachronic sequence, the synchronic repetition in the cycles illuminates the compositional content of the intervals as well” (Petersen 1980:203-4).

<sup>26</sup> The plural ‘you’ here involves those present when Jesus uttered these words, as well as even us who are centuries upon centuries removed from that moment (Shiner 2003:178).

following Jesus attracts rejection, suffering, even death.<sup>27</sup> And regardless of which boats we happen to be in, we are expected to continue Jesus' vision: "For the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).<sup>28</sup> Far from being threats, therefore, the *other boats* are in fact companions, there to present opportunities for Jesus' followers to practice the art of serving.

From Mark's perspective, an indication that one knows who Jesus truly is will be how such a one is open to life beyond the comforts of the "traditions of the ancestors" (Mark 7). Jesus' followers must shun traditions that justify the stigmatisation of different others, that favour appearance over substance, that encourage worship of temple and its servants at the expense of one's own parents (and children), that reject Gentiles as dogs, and encourage *many other things like that* (7:13). To be with Jesus is to be cognisant of and genuinely interested in the welfare of all *other boats* around you, the sea does not care about the labels you give your fellow voyagers. To follow Jesus is to be humble enough to see yourself through the eyes of the different other. Taking Jesus across *just as he is* means being genuinely concerned about those around you, those in the *other boats*.

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<sup>27</sup> They are denied comfort (8:32) as well as assurance of immediate reward (10:28-31) as Peter had anticipated. There is no promise of prominent position as the sons of Zebedee desired (10:35ff.) or the rest of the disciples secretly hoped for (9:33-37). Neither is there a promise of social recognition nor exclusivity as John articulated it on behalf of all (9:28-41). Sometimes even well-intentioned efforts will not yield anticipated results (9:14-29), neither will they enjoy immunity from prosecution (9:42-50). Instead, the Markan Jesus' response to all these expectation is constant: he discloses his impending crucifixion no less than three times (8:31ff, 9:31; 10:32-34), and at all three instances they fail to hear what he is saying.

<sup>28</sup> Professor Gain would be thrilled that the last word of this sentence is *πολλῶν* which resonates with his argument (briefly stated above) regarding Mark 4:36.

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