

# Ecological Reading of the Gospel of Mark

In the final part in the series **Elaine Wainwright** looks at Mark 16: 6–7 and points us back to Galilee to where the story started.

**A**s I came to prepare the December ecological reading of the Gospel of Mark, I was aware that our somewhat sequential reading would focus us on the conclusion of the Markan story of Jesus – his death and resurrection. This seemed somewhat out of sync with the Advent liturgical season we are entering. Further reflection turned my attention to the verses that all but conclude the short ending of Mark and which seem most appropriate to this season.

*Mk 6 But he [the young man in a white robe in the tomb] said to them: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”*

Go back to Galilee – go back to the place where this story began – there you will “see” him or even more strongly: there this powerful sense will enable you to “see again”, to see anew.

Jesus the crucified and raised one is not found in this one material space, the tomb, but also on the “open road” as scripture scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, says, going back to and in Galilee – but not as when we started.

## **Jesus’ body killed and buried**

Before we turn to this open road and toward Galilee, it seems appropriate in light of the young man’s naming of

Jesus as the one “who was crucified” to focus our ecological eyes just briefly on what was wrought on the human, the material body of Jesus.

This takes us from the time of Jesus’ receiving the healing ointment that *Murisa* poured over his anxiety-wracked body (Mk 14:3-9) to that same body being placed in a rock-hewn tomb (Mk 15:46), embraced by Earth.

## **Earth dangerously disrespected**

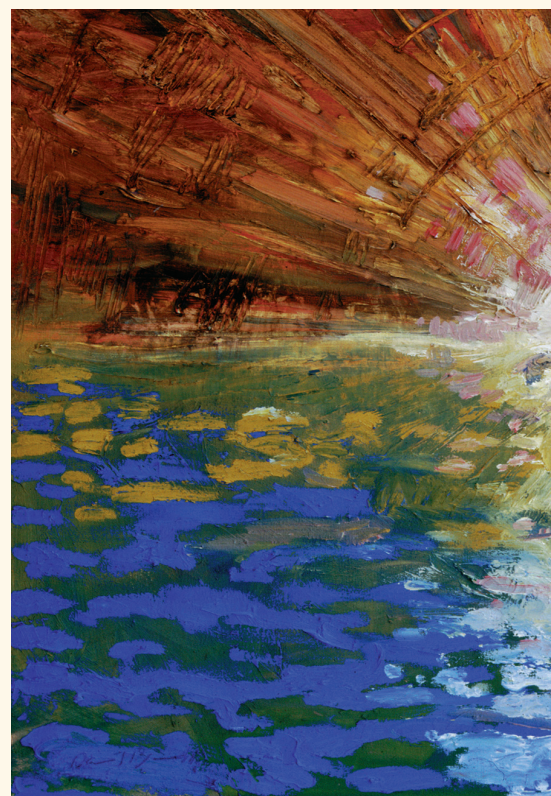
Bread broken and wine poured out (Mk 14:22-25) symbolise the heart of Jesus’ ministry that will be re-encountered back in Galilee. But this bread, this wine, this body and blood of Jesus are not singular. Caught up in them is Earth that is being raped by logging, by fracking, by deep sea drilling and myriads of processes too numerous to mention.

So many human and other-than-human beings are sharing the same fate as Jesus. Their bodies are annihilated by a greed-filled human empire like that of Rome. The very cosmos is being polluted by human interventions and inventions.

## **Betrayal in the Garden**

A garden called Gethsemane provides the place, the space for Jesus’ prayer that prepares him for a profound betrayal by one of his own beloved disciples. It is enacted through the most intimate form of touch – the kiss (Mk 14:45).

And this is followed quickly by the profound desertion: all the disciples deserted him and fled (Mk 14:56). Jesus’ very identity as teacher and friend has been shattered and he is left alone before a hostile power.



He carries in his body the abjection suffered by many among the human and other-than-human of the Earth community who are abandoned and betrayed. These include refugees fleeing violent death, earth itself, species and resources like water. We can see it mapped in and on many places and spaces in our neighbourhoods and across our planet.

## **Shattered hopes**

Order and identity continue to be shattered as the abjection of Jesus’ body continues in the Markan story: he is beaten by the guards (Mk 14:65) and led away by the soldiers, who strip his body of his own material covering and give him instead a purple robe which mocks him (Mk 15:16-20).

Jesus' body and clothes, the manifestation of his person, are profoundly dishonoured as are all Earth's other-than-human as well as human constituents who suffer and endure such abjection today at the hands of others, most predominantly from human others and their powerful coalitions.

### Cry of abjection

The very cosmos itself is caught up in Jesus' final moments as darkness covers the earth (and planet Earth) from noon until three (Mk 15:33-34).



It is as if Earth mourns the profound and absolute abjection of Jesus and carries this across time. The cry of Jesus concludes the relentless process of degradation/abjection — “My God, my God why have you (the Holy One) abandoned me.”

This cry echoes from all who suffer today, all the more-than-human constituents of Earth, all in-habitants of every habitat that is being degraded at this time, as was the body of Jesus.

### Not alone

This profound abjection does not, however, leave Jesus alone as in the garden. Readers learn that there are many women *looking on from afar*, their bodies straining toward the body of their companion (Mk 15:40-51) who has died before their eyes. The narrator's description of them is that they have followed Jesus from Galilee, *doing diakonia*, the tasks of disciples of Jesus.

Also, another disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, requests the body of Jesus. Jesus' material body, that has been dealt with abjectly and that could have been left on

the cross as food for carrion birds and animals or simple decomposition, is returned to Earth in another manner — it is laid in Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb hewn from rock. The body of Jesus returns to earth as does that of all Earth's creatures.

### Back to the beginning

Our journey has brought us back to where we began: the Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified has been raised. This place, this space of the rock-hewn tomb has been rendered empty of the corpse of Jesus.

He has been raised in his body-person-self, a claim that expands our material and our corporeal understandings. To stand at the empty tomb of the crucified one is transforming, an experience that at least momentarily caused the women to be filled with terror and amazement.

The message from the empty tomb is for disciples: “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him”. Galilee is the place of the gospel, the place of teaching and healing, the place of the call to *metanoia*, to a profound change of perspective (Mk 1:15).

Having followed the gospel story with Jesus through ministry, abject death, and quiet resurrection — listening, experiencing all with ecological eyes — we, the hearers/readers, must enter into the story again.

We have sought to repent, to change our perspective so that we might read ecologically. That we might include within our story the other-than-human whom we have so often ignored. That we de-centre ourselves as the human ones, as the only actants in the gospel narrative.

### Living anew into the gospel

As suggested at the beginning of this article, the directive to “go back to Galilee” fits well with our entry into the Advent season.

At the beginning of the liturgical year, we hear anew the call to *metanoia*, to repentance, to a shifting of our perspective so that we might live anew into the gospel story of Jesus as played out in the liturgical year.

We have sought during this year to read the gospel with the other-than-human, with Earth and all Earth's processes and beings as these interrelate profoundly with the human within the Earth community. To do so is to hear a new ethic. It is to give voice to a new call to repentance.

As next year unfolds, back in Galilee, we will hear the Gospel of Luke with these new ears, new eyes, new senses and sensitivities that we have learnt from the Gospel of Mark. ■

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