

## St. Mark and the Pandemic

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)*

April 25 on the Lutheran Church Year Calendar is the Commemoration of St. Mark. He is mentioned several times in the New Testament. His mother owned the house where Christians gathered for prayer (Acts 12:12)—was it the site of the Last Supper? Mark traveled with Barnabas and Paul, but parted ways with them over an unknown dispute. Later reconciled, Paul asked Timothy to send Mark to Rome to help him in his “prison ministry.” Not long after, according to church tradition, Mark himself was imprisoned and martyred in Alexandria, Egypt, for opposing the cult of Serapis. Papias, an early church historian, notes that Mark wrote “the gospel that bears his name,” as the “interpreter of Peter.” In 829 A.D. what people thought were his bones were moved to Italy to repose in the great Basilica San Marco in Venice. Around that time, during the prayer processions into the city of Rome, April 25 became the commemoration of St. Mark. We honour him by reading his Gospel, praying for a heart to hear what he is saying and the faith to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.

This April 25, people the world over are surely longing for good news. And the big telecommunications companies keep churning it out for us: vaccine rollouts, unexpected acts of kindness, heroic sacrifices for family and friends, dedicated front-line service under duress. We welcome these bytes and memes of good news as bright lights in the fog of anxiety. St. Mark delivered the gospel of Jesus Christ against a backdrop of anxiety and misinformation too. Jesus’ closest disciples often misunderstood him. His words and positions were often intentionally misrepresented by authorities and competitors. Even his miraculous acts often generated controversy. But through it all, Mark counts the steady pulse of promise and fulfilment; he traces God’s ever-present guidance and power in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he was saying to his time, so he says to ours: here is the beginning of good news that doesn’t just give us momentary relief from our troubles but changes us and our world so that we live good news all the time. That change Mark calls faith—not a system of beliefs we hold firm and sure, but a trust that God is here with us and will see us through as God saw Jesus through by raising him from the dead. The steady beat of the gospel of Jesus Christ at the heart of the Christian faith is the strength we need to weather the news cycles and panic waves of this pandemic. If you can, take an hour or so with the Gospel of Mark on April 25<sup>th</sup>. It is good news during any trouble.

Here is a prayer for St. Mark’s Day:

**Almighty God, you have enriched your church with Mark’s proclamation of the Gospel. Give us grace to believe firmly in the good news of salvation and live it every day; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen**