Sacrifice, Service, and Radical Inclusion: Participating in the Divine Critique according to the Gospel of Mark

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INTRODUCTION

When I first encountered the works of Dr. Paul Fiddes, I found his discussions of the relationship between power and Trinitarian participation to be most fascinating. The question of power has long captivated the imagination of social theorists, psychologists, and theologians. They have debated the definition of the word, the function of the concept, and the extent to which “power” infiltrates and determines human relationships. Theologians have questioned the kind of power exerted by God and how humans experience and participate in this power. Only in relatively recent years, however, has my own field of study in biblical research begun to engage in the discussions of power as they relate to the biblical texts and the lived experience of those texts.

One of the most interesting aspects of Fiddes’ work, in my opinion, is his discussion of Trinitarian relations, their critique of human power structures, and the ability of humans to participate in this divine critique. In what follows, I would like to engage with Dr. Fiddes’ understanding of the structure of the Trinity as an inherent critique of human power structures and the implication that humans can participate in the divine life by engaging in this critique of human power structures. Specifically, I would like to turn my attention to the Gospel of Mark- an understudied text with reference to power and participation- as a biblical resource for speaking to what it might look like to participate in the divine life by standing against domineering human power. The Markan gospel offers the careful reader an account of the divine understanding of power as explained to the disciples who hold a remarkably different understanding of power than their Messiah. Jesus leads the disciples to reimagine what it would look like to participate in the divine life by embracing the power that characterizes the kingdom of God rather than embracing the notions of power so prevalent in their society.

TRINITY, POWER, AND HUMAN PARTICIPATION

Theologians grapple over the most helpful language to describe this phenomenon of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and humanity’s relation to it. Among the most helpful options, Fiddes suggests that the “most adequate and appropriate language we have available to speak about the “persons” of the Holy Trinity is that they are relations.”¹ Rather than speaking of Father, Son and Spirit as individuals who have relations and are even constituted by those relationships, Fiddes argues for understanding the “persons” of the Trinity as “movements of life and love that have some resemblance to the relationships that we recognize between finite persons.”²

Drawing on the notion of perichoresis from both the eastern and western traditions, Fiddes suggests that the notion of a dance best represents this form and function of the “persons” of the Trinity as relations. “In this dance the partners not only encircle each other and weave in and out between each other as in human dancing; in the divine dance, so intimate is the communion that they move in and through each other so that the pattern is all-inclusive.”³ Thus we speak of the pattern of movements in a dance rather than the dancers themselves. Humans can participate in these divine movements of life and love like that of a father sending a son into


² Fiddes, “Relational Trinity,” 159-160.

³ Ibid, 175.
the world—acts of self-giving—or a son responding to a father with obedience and humility—being sent forth— or like the experience of the deepening of relationships that “renews all relations ‘from’ and ‘to’ the other.” In these ever flowing relations, humans are invited to participate in the dance as God makes room for created beings to enter and move toward God and others.

One of the most interesting implications of this understanding of Trinity is Fiddes’ avoidance of the kind of hierarchical language and overly unifying language concerning God that can lead to the validation of oppressive human power structures. To clarify, he offers an example from the Roman Empire in which a faulty understanding of God logically resulted in the divine approval of human structures of domination. Emperor Constantine understood the transcendent God to be sovereign over all, the divine Logos of God to govern the universe (being indistinguishable in essence from the transcendent God), and saw himself as the one human who governed upon the earth as God’s representative. He and his people were already familiar with the idea of a single ruler governing absolutely. They held a common understanding of power, in which power is the ability to conquer one’s enemies and avoid the suffering endured by those who are not powerful. In turn, according to Fiddes, these qualities of powerful governance were applied to God, in coordination with the embrace of Platonist philosophy, resulting in an “invulnerable and coercive” picture of God. This picture of God, in turn, validated the unbridled and potentially oppressive power of the earthly emperor. “If God is the heavenly Emperor, ruling through the Logos, he guarantees the reign of the earthly emperor;” this view, “validates the power of the earthly dictator.” This distortion of power and proper human governance is based on a faulty understanding of the divine life, particularly the structure of the Trinitarian life. If the divine life is understood as a movement of relations rather than a single subjectivity acting in various ways, this kind of validation is no longer possible.

Fiddes’ view has not, however, been without it critics, especially in relation to the topics of power and domination. In response to his critics, Fiddes takes great pains to ensure that this understanding of the Trinity speaks against oppressive human power structures rather than reinforcing them. One such criticism is that if the persons of the Trinity are to be understood as pure relations, they lose their “concrete particularity” and devolve into a “single subjectivity to which they are subordinate.” This in turn could validate a hierarchy within the church or church oriented state in which one who mediates for God, becomes an oppressive figure propagating an oppressive ideology. Fiddes responds to the claim of a loss of particularity, however, stating that there is nothing more distinct from one another than the differing movements of a relationship from father to son and son to father. This differentiation is what protects against the assumption of all three movements under a single actor in which humans do not participate but are rather mediated in their contact with the divine through the hierarchy. He argues, …we need to think in a participatory rather than an objectifying way, and the idea of persons as relations in God enables us to do so. The result is not to absorb the relations

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4 Ibid, 162.
6 Fiddes, Participating in God, 64.
7 Ibid, 64.
8 Ibid, 82-83.
into one identity and into one activity, but to prompt us to share in God rather than attempting to observe God. Far from resulting in the unifying of the divine substance and creating a chain of command and action through single church officers, to understand divine persons as relations is to foster a participative model of the church.\(^9\)

This reorientation of thinking with reference to the divine life, allows for a diversity of relational movements including a son who must suffer, must die, and must be estranged from a father and a suffering father who opens himself to disappointment and rejection that costs the father a “confrontation with death and nothingness.”\(^10\) In this reorientation of thought, even the language of “father” no longer stands as a reinforcement of patriarchy. Father is not the proper name given to God, but rather the representation of a relation that is like that of a father. In fact, the portrait of the father includes many motherly attributes especially the notion of begetting and birthing. This begetting opens the father to pain and suffering, and the father who suffers at the loss of a son can never be used to “sanction human structures of authority that show their power in inflicting suffering upon others and avoiding it themselves. This God is on the side of the victims, not the oppressors.”\(^11\) This “image of the triune God is a critique of human power structures,”\(^12\) and as we participate in the communion of the divine life - as we are drawn into the dance - we too are sent forth critique human power structures bent on domination and oppression. In other words, to critique human institutions of power is to participate in the divine life, in the power that characterizes the divine life.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK AND PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE CRITIQUE OF HUMAN POWER STRUCTURES

Dr. Fiddes draws deep connections between power and suffering, and he takes great pains to argue against a notion of the trinity that results in the validation of a system of domination within human institutions, including political, social, and ecclesial contexts. He argues that the very image of the triune God is a critique of human power structures, and created beings are invited to participate in this divine life. If this is the case, how do we participate in this aspect of the divine life and critique domineering and oppressive human power structures? Does the Markan Jesus offer any explanation of what it would mean to participate in the divine life in such a way as to call into question the validity and authority of human power structures, while reimagining our own definition of and use of power in the church and society? In what follows we will explore the theme of power and participation throughout the Gospel of Mark, with a more focused analysis of the center portion of the narrative, Mark 8:27—10:45. We will seek to address three main questions with reference to the text. Briefly first, what did the disciples believe about the human powers structures in which they were involved? We will examine the kinds of culturally influenced beliefs they held about power, and what expectations they had about their own power at the arrival of the Messiah. Second, what did Jesus teach the disciples about power and what effect was this teaching meant to have on the lives of the disciples? We will examine the ways in which Jesus reacted to his disciples concerning this topic and specifically look at the critique he

\(^9\) Ibid, 89.
\(^10\) Ibid, 96.
\(^11\) Ibid, 96.
\(^12\) Ibid, 96.
levied against their views on politics, patriarchy, riches, and social status. Third and in conclusion, I will turn my attention to the final question: what implications does this discussion have for the modern reader who seeks to participate in the divine power of which Jesus spoke, one that stands squarely against oppressive power? In other words, how do we continue to engage in the divine critique of human power structures?

**The Disciples and Power**

As we turn our attention to the text of the Gospel of Mark, the disciples serve as our entry point to the discussion of divine power and human participation. To understand Jesus’ teaching about power that characterizes the divine life and the kingdom of God, we must first understand the audience to which his teaching is addressed. The disciples of Jesus lived under the colonizing force of an oppressive imperial power and awaited a deliver from their oppression. This social location, no doubt, affected their understanding of human power.\(^{13}\) Imperial Rome exerted its form of peace with the power of a sword. The taxation of the people, the military presence in the land, and the occasional open confrontation on the grounds of temple during a festival, led to rising tensions between locals and Roman imperial forces and those governing on their behalf. Many Jews were willing to take up arms against the oppressor; others exerted more subtle resistance against the occupiers.\(^{14}\) The desire of many of the Jewish people was to return to a day when they lived independently, free from foreign powers. The coming Messiah offered a hope for those who looked toward a day when the oppressive and idolatrous Gentiles would be driven from the land.

The disciples were likely no exception to these prevalent ideas. They likely expected the Messiah to function as a revolutionary against their enemies, driving them from the land. The Gospel of Mark appears to validate that the disciples thought in this way. In the opening chapters of the Gospel, Jesus performed miraculous deeds, casting out demons and healing the sick and he did so exclusively among the people of Israel. At the end of chapter 4, however, the waters become turbulent as Jesus and the disciples cross over to the other side of the sea.\(^{15}\) Upon landing in what appears to be Gentile territory, the disciples seem to be unwilling to embark upon the mission Jesus has set before them.\(^{16}\) They remain in the boat while Jesus casts legion out from the man in the tombs. After crossing back to the Jewish side of the sea in an uneventful sea crossing, the disciples are sent out on their first solo mission which was apparently met with

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\(^{14}\) For a detailed account see: Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 28-120.


\(^{16}\) J. Ted Blakley, “Incomprehension or Resistance? The Markan Disciples and the Narrative Logic of Mark 4:1-8:30” (St. Andrews, Scotland: University of St. Andrews, 2008). Blakley argues that the sea-crossing motif draws attention to the disciples’ unwillingness to embrace the Gentile mission. The disciples were in fact subverting the mission of Jesus intentionally by neglecting and actively resisting the Gentile mission. See especially 63-194. His dissertation builds on the work of Struthers Malbon who argues that spatial location (east or west side of the sea) indicates a Jewish or Gentile audience. See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).
some success. After feeding a large Jewish crowd, Jesus sends the disciples to Bethsaida on their own, but they never reach the intended destination as they do not “understand about the loaves,” namely that even after the children are fed, there is enough left over for those who appear to be outsiders. It is the same message offered by the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” According to Jeffrey Gibson, the next time the disciples are in the boat heading to Gentile territory, they again attempt to resist the mission of Jesus to the Gentiles, refusing to bring bread across the sea hoping to subvert Jesus’ boundary breaking mission. When they arrive at Bethsaida in Mark 8, the disciples and Jesus encounter a man who must receive a second touch to be healed of his blindness. It seems quite clear that the blind man represents the failure of the disciples to see the significance of Jesus’ mission. Jesus was not expelling the Gentiles; he was bent on including them. The disciples understood that Jesus sought to include the Gentiles rather than overthrow them; the misunderstanding was to why Jesus would wish to do such a thing.

In 8:29, Peter claims that Jesus is the Christ, but he clearly is not ready to accept what that means, thus Jesus’ command to silence. Just three verses later, Peter rebukes Jesus for his first proclamation of suffering, death, and resurrection. This is not what was expected of the Messiah. Surely this is not power. Jesus, however, declares that the kingdom of God is coming with power and at least some of the crowd, including the disciples, will see it come during their lifetime. While the disciples are likely still dreaming of violent revolution, Jesus recognizes the need to teach the disciples about the power that characterizes the divine life and what it will mean for them all to participate in it. Over the next few chapters, the disciples continue to push back against the mission of Jesus, a topic to which we shall return in the next section. The disciples remain faithless to Jesus’ messianic program until the end. Jesus reaches out to Jew and Gentile alike. He is casting out demons and pushing back the darkness that has invaded sacred space. The power of the Messiah is not expressed in terms of violence against the other, coercion, or the inversion of political power, but is rather the power to overcome oppression through sacrifice, service, and inclusion of perceived outsiders.

### Jesus and a New View of Power

Jesus offers his disciples a new ethic of power that stands in contrast to their own expectations concerning power derived both from the their local context as well as their place in relation to Imperial Rome. This new conception of power was meant as a corrective to the disciples’ own understanding of the “powerful” kingdom of God as one that comes. While they certainly agreed with Jesus’ declaration that the kingdom of God was coming with power (9:1), what they failed to grasp was the type of power to which Jesus referred. Jesus invited his disciples to take part in the power that characterizes the divine life- the power that characterized his own life as one who was sent forth into a broken world- which is defined by suffering, service, and inclusion. Participating in this kind of power would have radical implications for their politics (10:41-45), religion (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34), and interpersonal relationships (9:35-40; 10:1-29). We

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17 Jeffrey B. Gibson, “The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mark 8:14-21,” *JSNT* 27 (1986): 31-47. Gibson argues that the disciples are actively resisting Jesus’ Gentile mission. He argues that the term translated “forgot” in the text is better translated as “willful neglect,” thus their neglect with reference to the bread was to ensure that Jesus could not perform a miracle and feed the Gentile masses.

will look at each of these as we walk through Jesus’ teaching concerning power in the central portion of the Markan narrative; finally, we will take a brief glance at the thematic development concerning power in the last chapters of Mark.

8:27-9:1: Rebutting the “things of man”

Discussed briefly above, in 8:29, Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ. While Peter's words may be accurate, Jesus silences Peter like the unclean spirits before him (Mark 1:25; 3:11-12). Why? I suggest that Peter and the others continue to misunderstand what Jesus' mission is really about. They have seen Jesus cast out demons, feed the masses, and heal the sick, but the true power of the kingdom, the power to transform the world, lies not in worldly demonstrations of violence, exclusion, and oppression, but rather, in the power of sacrifice and self denial.

At this point in the narrative Mark's Jesus calls on the disciples to reimagine what it means to be powerful. The first passion prediction is a clear call to a proper understanding of messianic power. Peter rebukes Jesus for his claims. In turn, Jesus also rebukes Peter for setting his mind on the things of man rather than the things of God. To follow Jesus is to lose one’s life in order to save it.19 The true disciple must embrace this vision of the world in order to be recognized by the Son of Man. Jesus does promise the disciples that many among them will see the kingdom of God when it has come with power, but it is qualitatively different from the oppressive and violent power of the world to which they were accustomed.

9:30-41: A new meaning to greatness

In 9:30-32 Jesus offers his second passion prediction. No sooner has Jesus concluded his announcement than the disciples are arguing about whom among them is the greatest. Jesus speaks of suffering and death, and the disciples continue to dream of glory and greatness. They have not moved “beyond the messianic expectations expressed by Peter’s confession” and still await their respective places of power in the kingdom.20 In what must seem so counterintuitive to them all, Jesus informs them that the first must be last of all and the servant of all. The first will be the one who accepts even a lowly child.

John appears to have disregarded Jesus’ instructions for inclusion as he immediately informs Jesus that the disciples attempted to stop an outsider- that is one who did not follow them- from casting out a demon. He presumed the authority to do so and even claims that the reason was because he did not “follow us.” He did not meet the disciples’ criterion for what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.21 Jesus insists that all who do mighty works in his name are for them and not against them. There seems to be no room for pride or exclusivity in the kingdom.

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19 Neufeld comments on the power of Jesus' acts, claiming that they must not be seen as the key to Messiahship. Powerful acts must be understood in the context of the suffering and the cross. The powerful Messiah will look a lot like a victim of the world's power. Thomas Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 59.


21 Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 189; Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi. ‘*But It Is Not So Among You*: Echoes of Power in Mark 10:32-45 (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 89, claims this is about a tolerance toward outsiders which is in keeping with my own emphasis on the Gentile mission in the early chapters of Mark.
After crossing into the region of “Judea beyond the Jordan,” Jesus began to teach the people “as was his custom.” No sooner had Jesus begun to teach than the Pharisees came to test him. Their question concerned divorce, specifically, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Why this question of all the questions the Pharisees could have asked? Why did the author use this portion of his traditional material? Given Mark’s concern for addressing issues of power up until this point in the narrative, I suggest this question is a continuation of this issue.

Women in the first century world did not share the same rights as men. Hence the question posed by the Pharisees betrays their own androcentric view of the world. The Pharisees did not ask if it was lawful for a person to divorce his/her spouse. They asked if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, implying men were the only ones allowed to initiate such action. Jesus responds to the Pharisees in kind with the question, “What did Moses command you?” The Pharisees claim that Moses did allow a man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away. Their answer reinforces the social structures that subjugate women to the role of an acted upon object rather than an acting subject. Jesus’ response, however, does not reinforce their patriarchal notions of the world. Rather, Jesus responds that Moses’ command was a result of the hardness of their hearts and was counter to the intention of creation. God created humans as male and female, and his intention was for them to become one and be equal. Schüssler Fiorenza comments, “as long as patriarchy is operative, divorce is commanded out of necessity. One is not allowed to abolish it within the structures of patriarchy. However, Jesus insists, God did not create or intend patriarchy but created persons as male and female human beings.”

It is this oppressive patriarchal structure within society that lies at the basis of Jesus’ critique of the allowance of divorce. God is not the author of patriarchy; the kingdom of God is not a patriarchal community, and the hardness of heart that led to such an allowance of divorce is not to be a part of this community either. Once patriarchy is abolished, a question such as the one the

22 Ched Myers. Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 264. Myers notes the lack of reciprocity for women in Jewish family law that would lead to a question being phrased in this way. Hooker point out that the Pharisees are questioning what is permissible under the law rather than asking what God wills concerning divorce. Jesus' answer focuses on the will of God and thus radical obedience rather than legalism. Morna Dorothy Hooker, A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 235.

23 Eugene Boring, Mark: A Commentary (Louisville: John Knox, 2006), 286. Scholars agree here that offering a certificate of divorce was an attempt to shield a woman from a man’s arbitrary choice to dismiss her. With the certificate she was free to remarry. Interestingly in Mark, unlike Matthew, the question is not about the reasons a man can divorce his wife, but rather the question of divorce itself. While Jesus may concede that the certificate of divorce shields a woman from some potential hardship, it does not do enough. Thus his answer radicalizes the law’s pronouncement.


25 See also Fiddes, Participating in God, 102, “Because the relations indwell each other in perichoresis, they are all identified with all the functions of God’s work in the world. If human being, male and female, reflect in their mutual relationships the relations in God, there is thus no model for excluding women from certain functions in society and church, as ‘an unsuitable job for a woman.’”
Pharisee’s posed becomes irrelevant. The kingdom has no place for the oppression of a woman by the husband’s choice to divorce.26

The Pharisees are silenced in the story and Jesus and the disciples continue the discussion in the house. In the house Jesus clearly states that divorce ends in adultery; however, his own pronouncement clearly states the equality between the sexes with reference to divorce. While the Pharisees asked only if a man could divorce his wife, implying a woman was not capable of making such a choice, Jesus’ explanation to the disciples claims that neither husband nor wife is to divorce the other.27 More radical still, the action of divorce is an act leading to adultery for male and female alike. In the ancient Jewish understanding, only the rights of the husband could be violated by adultery.28 In the kingdom of God, women are considered a man’s equal both in the context of protection and judgment. Divorce is not allowed as a system of oppression in the coming kingdom. The two people are joined together forever, as was intended in creation. The kingdom of God is an attempt to return to the perfection of creation where the balance of power was equitably distributed, where familial relations are not characterized by oppression and domination.29

10:13-16: The Kingdom is going to the kids

No sooner has Jesus articulated a return to the standards of creation than the disciples rebuke those who are bringing the little children to Jesus to bless. Children, like women, were not agents of power in first century society. They, like women, were nonentities religiously and politically.30 Parents had complete control over life and death and had the choice to provide or not to provide for them. The father exercised complete authority over his children and demanded obedience. Children were wholly dependent upon the family for their survival.31

Jesus, however, invites the little children to come near to him. Children are not only the ideal disciples, but the kingdom actually belongs to them! Everyone who comes to the kingdom must come like one of these children. Children are not to be pushed aside and discarded; they are to be valued and seen as positive examples of the kind of faith welcomed in the kingdom. Schüssler Fiorenza points out that this is not merely an “invitation to childlike innocence and naiveté but a challenge to relinquish all claims of power and domination over others.”32

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27 Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 287–288. Boring points out that this likely betrays the Gentile location of the text as Gentile women could divorce. In order for a Jewish woman to divorce her husband, she would have to be wealthy, and it would be scandalous.

28 Ibid., 287.

29 Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 236.


can make no claim to power; to become like a child is to become dependent on others, become dependent on God. 33 In other words, Jesus does not call people simply to take care of the powerless, but rather calls them to abandon all expressions of oppression and domination and realize their own interdependence on others. Power dynamics in society are inevitable, but the structures of domination and oppression are interpretations of power that must be abandoned in the context of the kingdom. In the kingdom of God, the doors are open to all equally and without regard to their status in the broader culture. Quite the contrary, the weak and disenfranchised are the possessors of the kingdom.

10:17-31: It’s not about the money

Travelling on his way, and to the other end of the social spectrum, a rich young man approaches Jesus like the children did before him. The rich young man wants only to know what he must do to inherit eternal life; Jesus answers by referring to the commandments. The rich man replies that he has kept them all from his youth. 34 Jesus, loving the man, gives him a single qualification to enter the kingdom; he must sell everything and give it to the poor. The kingdom is characterized by the dismantling of power structures that oppress the powerless. In this story, a rich man, the most privileged and powerful in a patriarchal society, wants to inherit eternal life. Jesus announces that he must sell all of his possessions and give them to the poor, thereby countering the power structures that perpetuate poverty and exploitation.

The rich young man walks away disheartened, as he could not do what was required of him. Jesus then turns to his disciples and twice informs them that it is difficult for those with wealth to enter into the kingdom of God. Twice, the disciples stand amazed at Jesus’ words. Their experience has shown them that wealth is the solution to every worldly problem, but apparently it cannot solve the problem of entry into the kingdom of God. Only through a proper understanding of the kingdom and its power structures- namely, countering the social structures that perpetuate inequality- can one enter the kingdom. It is for this reason that wealth is the inhibitor of entry. Wealth becomes the problem not only because of its ability to rule over a person, but also because the processes for the acquisition and maintenance of that wealth are often at odds with the goals of the kingdom. 35 Hence it is not impossible to enter the kingdom with wealth, but it is about as likely as camel trotting through the eye of a needle!

Peter, in usual flourish, reminds Jesus that the disciples present with him have all left everything to follow him. Jesus declares that everyone who has left everything- house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children and lands- will receive a hundred fold return on what they have

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33 Fiddes, Participating in God, 106-107. So too Fiddes claims that, “Children in their relative helplessness have something like this sense of dependence upon their parents and other adults…we take our experience of being a child into the communion of God’s life, and discover a motherly-fatherhood which is not oppressive.”

34 Herman C. Waetjen, A Reordering of Power: A Sociopolitical Reading of Mark’s Gospel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 168. Waetjen suggests the fact that the rich young ruler had kept the commands from his youth connects him with the child-like approach necessary for entry into the kingdom. The fact that Jesus responds affectionately towards the young man as he did with the children, again shows the man’s nearness to the kingdom.

35 Waetjen argues similarly that the only way this rich man became rich was through economic exploitation and perhaps social and political oppression as well. See Waetjen, A Reordering of Power, 170. Similarly Myers argues that the rich man must make restitution for his exploitation, proving that he has not actually kept all the commandments from his youth. See Myers, Binding the Strong Man, 274. So also Richard Horsley, Hearing the Whole Story (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 191.
lost- houses, brothers, sisters, mother, children, land, and persecution! It is important to note that the two lists are not identical. That which shall be restored to the disciples is lacking one familial relation, the father. The father in Greco-Roman society had, “at least theoretically...power of life and death over his children, whom he could dispose in marriage, dispossess of property, and even sell without their consent.” In the kingdom of God there is no such figure. As the reader will learn in 10:42-43, the great ones among the Gentiles lord it over their underlings, but it will not be so in the kingdom of God. The father is replaced by “persecutions” in the return. While the children of the kingdom are not to exert oppressive power over one another, they will face persecution by those who will continue to do so.

Mark 10:32-34: And a third time

Jesus turns to his disciples on the same journey begun in Mk 10:1 and informs them again of what is to happen shortly. This is the third time that Jesus has tried to explain where his true power lies. On the heels of Jesus’ challenge to patriarchy, subjugation, and economic oppression, his explanation of the way to overcome the powers of the world through death and resurrection should make perfect sense to the disciples. Nothing is as it seems. Jesus is not the kind of Messiah they had envisioned; he was not about to overthrow governments and seize the seat of a king, at least not with a sword. The transformative capacity of human action in the kingdom is bound up in sacrifice. He is the first who will put himself last, and this is the power of the kingdom. The sword cannot compare to death and resurrection.

Mark 10:35-45: Not like those Rulers

Even after all their time with Jesus, even after they were told that the last would be first, James and John ask Jesus to do whatever they ask of him. Of everything they could ask for, James and John ask for the one thing that they clearly do not understand- to sit at the right and left of Jesus in positions of power. They do not understand what it means to ask for power in the kingdom of God. They dream of glory, but unwittingly they ask for suffering. Thus Jesus tells them that they do not know what they are asking. He directly inquires of their ability to drink from the cup from which he drinks and to be baptized with his baptism. They answer affirmatively, and Jesus promises that they will drink from his cup and be baptized as he is to be shortly. In words foreshadowing the coming crucifixion, Jesus informs them that he has no say over the places to

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37 Most commentators suggest that God becomes the new father rather than an earthly father. See for example William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 372. This does not, however, negate the claim that there is not a typical father figure in the new family. God the father stands as benevolent and loving, non-oppressive father as revealed by Christ’s own interaction with him. This is quite similar to Fiddes’ claim that, “If Christians find the nature of God finally and fully disclosed in the speech and acts of Jesus, then we can never separate the address of Jesus to his Father form the movement of relationship within God, and it provides the key for us to enter the divine communion here and now.” *Participating in God*, 90.

38 Alberto De Mingo Kaminouchi, “But it is not so among you”: *Echoes of Power in Mark 10.32-45*, (JSNTSup (New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 91. He reminds the interpreter that this entire section is to be read as an ironic drama about power. James and John do not understand what they are asking for, and the other disciples are afraid they missed out on a position of power granted to James and John. While this is not unique to his reading of this text, he offers a much fuller treatment of it than most.
his right and left. Further evidence that the disciples have misunderstood what has taken place is found in Mk 10:41. The other disciples become indignant as if James and John had received some authority or power to which they were not privileged.  

Jesus continues his attempt to persuade the disciples of the appropriate expressions of power in 10:42-45. The text claims of the disciples that “you know” the rulers of the Gentiles lord their power over the masses. This is the only instance in which the disciples are said to already know something, a further indication that they have certain expectations about power to which Jesus must offer correction. Among the disciples this kind of exercise of power is never to be the case. The greatest among them is the servant of them all; the first among them is to be the slave of all. Power is expressed differently in the kingdom than it is in the world. As the greatest example of power reimagined, Jesus, the Son of Man, “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). It is through this giving of himself that the old power structures, spiritual and physical, no longer must captivate humanity, and the “many” are free to embrace the kingdom and the new understanding of true power associated with it - the power to move mountains, to abandon patriarchy and oppression, and the power to drink of the cup and be baptized with the baptism of selfless abandon and radical service to the other and thereby participate in the divine life as those who are sent to suffer for the many.

Mark 11-16

It should be noted that teaching concerning power does not cease after chapter 10. Rather, the theme of power persists all the way to the conclusion of the gospel. First, the disciples still do not understand what is required of them in the kingdom of God. The disciples scold the woman who anoints Jesus for his burial. While at first glance they seem to have understood Jesus’ call to care for the poor, they have completely missed the bigger issue of Jesus’ impending death. They have yet to accept what their Messiah intends to do, what their Messiah must do. This becomes clearer in the garden as one with Jesus raises his sword in defense of Jesus when the soldiers come to take him away. They have yet to accept what must come if the kingdom is to come. As Jesus is arrested, everyone flees. Their true devotion is laid bare, as bare as the young man running away without his linen cloth.

At the crucifixion, themes of power are revisited once more. The soldiers mock Jesus in what drips of dramatic irony. They clearly misunderstand what Jesus is about to accomplish. In perhaps the most ironic moment of them all, a centurion standing opposite the cross - the epitome of an outsider, an armed, Roman Gentile, declares, “truly this was the Son of God.” While the disciples were unwilling to accept Jesus’ ministry to the Gentiles, Jesus final act of sacrifice led a Gentile (and in the text, only a Gentile) to see the power of cross event, the kingdom of God come with power. On each side of Jesus there hung a robber, one on his right and one on his left. These places were not for Jesus to give as we were told in Mk 10:40, but they are a sign of the power of his glory even on the cross.

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39 Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 278. Myers also contends that their indignation is a result of their own misunderstanding of power in the kingdom of God.

40 Kaminouchi, ‘But it is not so among you,’ 117-18.

41 Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 278. Myers points out that the greatest irony of the request of James and John is that they do not know what they have asked for and the places of honor go to two robbers. Only those willing to suffer at Jesus’ side will experience his glory. So also Kaminouchi, ‘But it is not so among you,’ 112-116.
When all is said and done, Peter denies him, the disciples leave him, and only a handful of women are left to see the death, burial, and subsequent empty tomb. Even then, however, the women flee in fear, and the audience is left to wonder if anyone has really understood the call of Jesus to reimagine the world in light of true power, the power of sacrifice to bring the kingdom of God to earth, the power to save the world without any boundaries. With or without the recognition by the disciples, by the end of the Gospel of Mark, the kingdom of God has come in power; the empty tomb was proof that the crucifixion- Jesus’ act of suffering and self-giving for both Jew and Gentile- had accomplished its purpose.

CONCLUSION

By way of summary, I ask one final question: what implications does the story of Mark have for the modern reader who seeks to participate in the divine power of which Jesus spoke? In other words, how do we continue to engage in the divine life through the critique of human power structures? To be sure, there is no shortage of domination and oppression in our world today. The first step is to identify these structures- to name them- rather than ignoring them and standing in silent complicity. The disciples of Jesus were captivated by the power that surrounded them. They sought to replace those in power and enact their own system of oppression rather than dismantling oppressive power structures and participating in their own true liberation. They sought the power to reinforce their understanding of the coming kingdom of God rather than embracing the mission of Jesus. They did not wish to relinquish the power to which they thought they were entitled as Jews, as men, as future rulers. Jesus, however, called out these institutions and deeply ingrained traditions for what they were: domination and oppression. He offered another kind of power- the power that characterizes the divine life- as a corrective to these oppressive structures.

Second, we must engage the oppressors through sacrifice, service, and the openness to radical inclusion of even the perceived enemy. Jesus commanded the disciples to love the least of these, embrace the poor, and even reevaluate their own notions of patriarchy in light of the coming kingdom. He called them to include the perceived outsider even as the disciples stood afraid of them. Jesus called them to lead by service, by becoming last, not by lording their power over people as the ruling authorities had done and continued to do so over them. They were to stand in resistance to and protest of the oppressive power exerted around them, but they were not to take up swords against those structures. As Fiddes and Wink remind us, non-violence does not mean non-resistance and most certainly does not mean non-forceful.

Finally we must take comfort that we do not stand alone. As we stand in resistance to the powers, we participate in the divine act of liberation and likely also participate in the divine suffering as those who are mocked and abandoned. We also stand alongside others who challenge the validity of human power structures. Further, this suffering is not meaningless. Jesus’ final act of resistance to the human powers of domination was suffering and death on a cross, but it was also the moment when the least likely of subjects- an outsider- declared his divine origins. He became estranged from the world and his father for the sake of “the many.” His action defeated death and overcame the hard-heartedness of an outsider. So too, in our protest against oppression, we may be called to lay down our comfort or our lives for the sake of “the many.” We may be called to suffering, but we do not suffer alone nor do we suffer meaninglessly.

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42 Fiddes, Participating in God, 97; Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 175-93.
As we are drawn into the divine life and are sent forth to encounter the world, we too can challenge the oppressive power of the world through service and self-sacrifice. Service and sacrifice are in fact quite powerful; they have the power to make outsiders, insiders. They have the power to make oppressors side with the oppressed. Violence subjects the other to a state of a permanent outsider; suffering and sacrifice invite outsiders to become insiders. As we participate in the divine dance, we are sent forth to bear witness to the divine power at work in our lives and draw others into the divine life with us. This call to suffering, service, and radical inclusion remains open to all who wish to participate, and by accepting this invitation we too can take part in the divine life through the critique of human power structures.