Sunday 16th June 2024

When reading the final verses in Mark, it opens the question of why it says; ‘as they were able to hear it’. Coincidentally I came across the German translation of this verse (33) and in German it says; ‘to make the message of God understandable for the people’ (um den Menschen die Botschaft Gottes verständlich zu machen).

So back to the Greek original text. Literally the Greek text says: ‘so that they were able to hear’.   
The English text is here correct, but the English text doesn’t say what they are able to hear. In this the German translation ads a correction by pointing explicitly to the message, to God’s Words, which Jesus spoke to the people.

Well, so what, you might ask, what does this difference in translating matter? Isn’t it just nit picking. It matters because Jesus spoke the Word of God in a way people were able to understand it on the level they were at.

We live in similar times again in this day and age. What do the average person on the street still know about Jesus Christ or about the gospel. They know much more about the Euro 24 than about the real Jesus Christ. Although, everybody somehow seem to know Jesus, because I hear His Name spoken by many people all around me. Switch on the telly and you probably hear the Name of Jesus many times.

A few years ago on several occasions  the children from year 5 from BPS came to the church to hear about the church. I remember one boy who was very afraid to come into church, he was nearly shaking. When we asked why he was so afraid he said because his father had told him that the dead people live in the church.

What do people still know about the church? Ask an average person on the street and they remember the church as an institute, somewhat similar to the monarchy, with pump and ceremony and if not than an organisation standing up for all who seems to be marginalised.

I had to go to Birmingham recently to renew my passport. Somewhere in the outside of town areas I didn’t see a church, but instead minarets and a large Hindu temple. Most women on the streets were wearing head scarfs or hijabs, I don’t think they know, or have anything to do with the church whatsoever. If the church becomes so unknown in such areas, what about the gospel itself.

On the other hand, we should never loose hope or think that the gospel is a lost case.   
G.K. Chesterton once said: ‘At least five times, the Faith has to all appearance gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died’.

When I was still lecturing NT theology at the Azusa theological seminary, as part of the VU in Amsterdam, I had one of my students who had started a Bible study for Moslem people in his own town. He had between 10 to 15 Moslem participants who came to his house every week to follow Bible studies with him.

Of course, they continued to go to the Mosque, but he was able to sow a seed of the message of Jesus Christ into their lives. How and when it ever came to fruition he didn’t know, but at least he was able to preach the gospel to a group of people who don’t know it.

It says in the last verse of our reading that privately Jesus explained everything to His disciples. Because they were His disciples, they were on a different level. We cannot expect the ones who hear the parables to be on the same level as the disciples who were taught by Jesus afterwards.

There’s not much difference today. Many who hear about Christ cannot be expected to be on the same level as those who have heard and believe. Being a believer in Christ puts someone on a different level than the one who only hears the gospel message.

But, that brings its responsibilities. As much as the disciples remained close to Jesus, so are all those who believe to be expected to remain close to Christ. Without remaining close to Jesus as the disciples did it becomes impossible to come to a deeper understanding of the saving grace and words of the Gospel that God has given to us through Jesus Christ.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ remains a lifelong learning curve and it can happen when we stay close to Jesus Christ. How is for each and everyone a personal choice and way of life, but it remains a commitment.