Background on Mark's Gospel

Almost all the words you will hear tonight are literal translations of the words spoken by an evangelist named Mark in ancient Rome, almost 2,000 years ago. Mark was probably the first person to record the events of Jesus' ministry. At least two of the other three gospels are based *directly* on Mark's words. But who was Mark? Many scholars believe he was the Apostle Peter's assistant in Rome, and that this gospel recounts the testimony of Peter himself months before he was executed.

There are other important details that are little known. For example, much of Mark's story was written in the present tense, although all current translations use the past tense because it "reads" better. But Mark's gospel was never meant to be read, but *heard!* It was meant to be an "oral" gospel. The many run-on sentences, the "ands" and "immediately's" you will hear tonight are in the original text.

It was also intended to be heard as *one* story, in one sitting, not as a collection of isolated scripture readings in church. When we experience it this way, the controversial ending of Mark's gospel, "And they didn't say anything to anyone because they were afraid" begins to make sense. To the Christians being persecuted in ancient Rome, Mark was saying, "Don't be afraid, go finish the story of faith in your *lives.* To us today it is a penetrating call to examine our fears and go live our faith.

Background on AFRAID!

Over thirty years ago, the celebrated English actor Alec McCowen electrified London and Broadway by coming on stage and reciting *The Gospel According to St. Mark.* Frank Runyeon was in the audience and was inspired to begin development of a new play based on the same text. He wondered if Mark's gospel couldn't also be staged more theatrically. *AFRAID!* is his answer.

AFRAID! is not a recitation, but a play. It is the fruit of years of work on the original Greek text, searching for words that capture, in common American speech, what the original Greek words meant to Mark's first audience. And it is unabashedly theatrical.

You may ask, "But was all this theater intended by the original author?" Maybe. The structure of Mark's gospel parallels the 5-act dramas of ancient Rome, and Mark's audience was, in many ways, as used to action-packed drama and suspense as we are today. Who is to say: Mark himself may have "acted out" each story

About Frank Runyeon

Frank Runyeon has received national acclaim for his work as a translator and performer of Biblical texts over the past 20 years. He has performed the Gospel for hundreds of thousands of people in virtually every state in America. **He is probably still best known, however, for his many roles on television.** He starred for seven years as Steve Andropoulos on *As the World Turns* opposite Meg Ryan, and for four years as Fr. Michael Donnelly on the Emmy-award-winning *Santa Barbara*. He also appeared opposite Emma Samms on *General Hospital* as playboy Simon Romero. He has guest-starred in recurring roles on *L.A. LAW*, *Falcon Crest, All My Children,* and *Melrose Place.*

Frank starred in the feature film *SUDDEN DEATH* as Detective Marty Lowery. **He received rave reviews on the New York stage** as Hercules in Aristophanes' comedy, *The Birds* at the La Mama Theatre. He has also hosted his own comedy talk show on the top-rated L.A. talk-radio station, KFI, and on WCNN in Atlanta.

Frank is a graduate of Princeton University with a degree in Religion and American Studies. He wrote his thesis on the Mass Media. He has also studied at Fuller Seminary, Yale Divinity School, and the General Theological Seminary in New York, where he received his Masters Degree with honors.

Frank has translated and adapted six Biblical texts for one-man theatrical performance:

- ***AFRAID! The Gospel of Mark***
- ***Sermon on the Mount***
- ***SIGNS: The Gospel of John***
- ***LUKE: Stories on the Road***
- ***The Letter of James,*** *and*
- ***The 3 1/2 Stories of Christmas****, a joyful comedy, with music.*

He tours these productions around the country concurrently with his talks on ***Hollywood vs. Faith.*** He is now writing a book, ***Escape from Hollywood: An Actor's Unlikely Journey to Faith.***