

## ‘Mark’s Gospel’ at Mercury Theater speaks for itself

By Chris Jones  
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Whatever your feelings for, relationship with, or interest in Jesus of Nazareth, you’ll have heard a great deal about him. And that knowledge will likely have filtered throughout your life, beginning when you were very young.

One of the great virtues of Max McLean’s simple but surprisingly compelling one-man show, “Mark’s Gospel,” at Mercury Theater, is that you get the chance to start over.

I don’t necessarily mean that in religious terms (although for some it may afford that opportunity). I mean that you can settle back in your seat and think, ‘OK, I am now going to spend about two hours of my life listening to and pondering one of the gospels in the



New Testament -- the shortest of the four, yes, but the one written closest to the actual life of Jesus and likely a primary source for the opening of Matthew and Luke. I am not watching a portion of that story; I am going to experience the whole thing.’

Sure, the “Radio City Christmas Spectacular” does a good job with the birth and plenty of churches do the end pretty well at Easter, but when it comes to this particular story, you really can’t beat the entire shebang at one sitting.

Most of us never get to hear this great narrative in that fashion. This treatment of Mark is rather like one of those Great Book lectures, where the lecture is just the book. And I found that a worthy use of a couple of hours.

While nothing in this opinion-centered world comes without some kind of an ideological filter, McLean and his director, Jeffrey Fiske, aim for a mostly unobtrusive presence, letting the words and the vivid biblical characters say what they have to say and the hearers take what they will.

One of the greatest virtues of this well-known performer of the Bible (I saw McLean do the Book of Genesis at Pegasus Players some 12 years ago) is his refusal to imbue his words with great spiritual significance, thus upstaging the narrative itself.

That’s not to say he doesn’t speak these words uncommonly well. McLean, whose last show at the Mercury Theater was “The Screwtape Letters,” is formidably articulate -- at Friday’s show, he didn’t stumble over a single syllable -- and he is a sufficiently skilled man of the theater to know that even the story of Jesus needs to be injected with some pace.

Any life-changing moments will come from the text rather than the theatrical values.

But “Mark’s Gospel” bops along nicely from John the Baptist to the empty tomb, accompanied by a cheesy digital map, demonstrating the trajectory of Jesus and his followers through Judea and revealing that the events of this earth-shattering life unfolded in a very small place.

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“Compelling...  
Life-Changing  
Moments!”

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