



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Reimagined: Mission”

Part X of the Sermon Series, “Reimagined.”

Mark 16:1-8

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When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

I have journeyed through the Gospel of Mark not only with you but also with other ministers. My weekly Ministers’ Bible Study has been working through Mark using a commentary written by a future Edmunds Lecturer here, Ben Witherington.

At our study a week ago, we talked about how Jesus almost always uses other people’s stuff in his ministry.

Well, once, *maybe* he did something in his own home. Matthew’s Gospel says that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. So, when Mark reports that it is heard that Jesus is “at home” in Capernaum, it might have been at Jesus’ house. So, when the crowd gathers so thick that



some guys tear a hole in the roof to lower their paralyzed friend to his feet, it might have been up to Jesus not only to heal the man but also later fix the roof.

But, everything else that Mark reports happening in a house-teaching, healing, welcoming those others reject-it is in someone else's house-

-the homes of Simon and Andrew,

-of Simon the Leper,

-and someone's home in Gentile country where he ministered to a woman with a flow of blood.

And let's not forget the *Passover Meal*, Jesus' last supper, where they eat simply because a homeowner is told,

"We have need for your house, give us your guest room."

It is not just houses. Think of the other stuff that belongs to others that Jesus uses:

- When Jesus stands in a boat to teach, the boat belongs to Peter.
- When he is told thousands are hungry, he tells the disciples to collect what they can from the people who are there.
- When a scribe challenges him to answer the question, **"Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?"** he has to ask someone else for a denarii before saying, **"Looks at Caesar's inscription. Give to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God."**
- Someone provides a donkey so Jesus can ride into Jerusalem because a message came that **"the master has need of it."**
- My goodness, even when Jesus dies, he is buried in *someone else's tomb*.

To give my point a final *sharpening*, take a quick peek in the beginning of Luke's Gospel. When Jesus is born, he is in another town and is laid in a manger for there is no room for him in the Inn.

Not his boat, not his house, not his bread and fish, not his coin, not his donkey, not his tomb...; almost the entire ministry of Jesus takes place in other people's places using other people's things.

He teaches his disciples to follow his lead. Sending them out two by two to offer a ministry of healing, he tells them to take no bread, bag, or money of their own but depend on the houses and hospitality of others.

A cynic would call them "moochers." I don't see them that way. I told the other ministers and they reminded me of deep south preachers.

I grew up a preacher's kid in the deep south, had internships in the deep south and before moving to Roanoke, served a church in the deep south where I assumed what I had been trained to assume that that is: *if it belongs to a church member, then it is available to the church*.

- If someone had a Lake House and I wanted to use it for a staff retreat, the only issue was if it was already being used that weekend.



- If someone had a swimming pool, there was no question the youth could use it. I just had to schedule it.
- If someone had a big den and dining room, then they had the house we needed for a prospective member dinner.
- If someone had certain skills—as a lawyer, as a handyman, as someone good with Apple IIe computers—then I would call that person first before spending the church’s money on a specialist.

I carried that same working assumption with me when I came to Second Presbyterian Church 23 years ago. I got away with it too. It is remarkable how often people will say “Yes,” when the tone of the preacher asking is, “Of course you’re going to say, Yes.” But I noticed the assumption in Virginia was not as strong as it was in Alabama and Mississippi. Being pushy or manipulative is not my thing, and now I am more open to the answer being “No” and more grateful when the answer is “Yes.”

However, I don’t think Jesus ever wavered in his assumption that, “Of course, your life and resources should be available for the causes of the Gospel.” Now, for Jesus, that did not always mean the church—or in his case, the synagogue—or even something identified with religion. But it’s clear that he expected others to do what they could to spread the good news of the Gospel in the same ways he did: preaching love of God and neighbor, teaching God’s Law, helping the hurting, noticing the forgotten, showing grace to the excluded, witnessing for justice and working for peace.

Judging by our passage from Mark, *God* feels the same way. When three women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body for burial, they are shocked to find the tomb empty except for a young man wearing a white robe. The women are a bit traumatized and respond to what they see and not to what the man says. They run from the tomb terrified, and don’t do what he tells them to do and that is to find the disciples to tell them that Jesus is raised and will meet them in Galilee.

Hey, we’re many miles and centuries removed from that tomb and we’ve heard this story before. So, since we can think more calmly and clearly, can we take in what the messenger said? He said that Jesus will be found where the disciples live, in Galilee.

How about that? Jesus is yet again going to get in their lives and business. Not even a death and resurrection changes Jesus’ assumption that the Gospel will continue to spread through others. The book of Acts even tells the story of how this is déjà vu all over again. The Gospel advances in all the ways it did when Jesus walked among them; through

their homes,
 where they work,
 with the sick and with the outcast,
 in the middle of life’s debates,
 in private and in public,
 among the common people and in halls of power,
 in conversations about what is right and wrong,



among the Jews and among the Gentiles.
What are we to hear in all this?

Maybe if we are looking for Jesus, it won't be in some house that he has in heaven, but in the midst of our lives. At church, yes, because that's where we gather to worship, learn, and pool our resources to proclaim the Gospel in targeted ways. Yes, also at home where hopefully character is formed. But also, out in the world where character matters—
the neighborhood and the workplace,
in messy politics,
in hard conversations,

in all that can be done to help our world reflect just a little bit more the vision of the realm Jesus described when he spoke of and demonstrated the Kingdom of God. You might remember that the symbol of Mark's Gospel is a human being to remind us that Mark's Gospel is incarnational—the Gospel found in the life of Jesus. I would add that this means that Mark's Gospel is also *materialistic*—because life is lived through the stuff of human life: relationships and power expressed in the goods and services of the world.

That doesn't sound right. Maybe that's why theologians have dressed this message up a bit by calling it sacramental. By the bread and wine of the table, by the water of baptism—by the material stuff of life, we can find God's grace and show God's grace.

Or not. After all, the nails used to build houses are just as easily used to nail hands and feet to a cross. Stuff can be the means of greed rather than gratitude, of exploitation rather than compassion.

When Frank Runyeon performed his adaptation of Mark's Gospel, the play ended with his saying, "[The Gospel Begins](#)." I think Frank captured the spirit of what Mark is trying to tell us at the end. The good news of Jesus is to be a story told with our lives. We will find and follow Jesus where he was found and followed when he walked this earth. Certainly, he will be found and followed in places of worship, for we remember Jesus going to synagogue. But he will be found and followed where we live and work, where the decisions of life are made, where justice and compassion are needed, and where character and morals really count.

The title of this sermon is Mission Reimagined. There is nothing wrong with the way we think of missions. We think of mission taking place at the Presbyterian Community Center, through the work of Union Presbyterian Seminary, and over in the Dominican Republic. Mission is described as happening over there—in the southeast community, in Richmond VA, in San Juan de la Manguana. It is something we go to do, set money and time aside for. It is something we volunteer for. Or, if we get paid, we might call ourselves missionaries. That part of our budget that supports these efforts is called the "Outreach Budget." We go out and do good, and then we come back into our lives.

Again, there is nothing wrong with that. But if our passage is truly heard, there is a deeper truth to be understood. The mission of the Gospel is advanced, or not advanced, in how we live



our lives and manage our stuff on a daily basis. It hasn't stopped, this habit of Jesus using what belongs to us. He continues to have the audacity to say, "I need you," in a way that assumes the answer should be "Yes."

