

Jesus at Simon and Andrew's House

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[0 : 00] We're in the Gospel of Mark, and we have been going verse by verse, phrase by phrase, paragraph by paragraph, exploring the story of Jesus. And in verse 15, Jesus bursts onto the scene.

His cousin John has been arrested, and Jesus comes into the public sphere, out of the wilderness, into the public life, and declares the time has come. The Kairos moment of God, that moment that breaks into chronological history and declares something new, the time has come.

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent. Change your minds. Metanoia. Change your life. Turn to something new, and believe the good news, the Gospel, the euangelion.

Jesus takes this empire word and turns it on its head to declare that God is bursting into reality and doing something new in our world.

And this whole worldview, the idea of there being a kingdom of darkness and God coming forth and bringing forth a kingdom of light, shows us how we are meant to read the Gospel of Mark.

[1 : 05] That from here on forward, when we hear Jesus say something, when we see Jesus do something, it is all a continuation of that proclamation that the kingdom of God has come near.

That where God wants his will to be done, he is doing it in the person of Jesus. So when Jesus says something, that's the kingdom of God being preached. When Jesus does something, that's the kingdom of God being shown and enacted.

So we pay attention. Jesus declares that the kingdom of God has come near, and unlike other messiahs that had come before him, doesn't begin gathering armies and collecting swords and shields, but rather goes to some fishermen along the lake, and like a rabbi does, says, come and follow me, imitate me.

He doesn't go to the high places. He doesn't go to the capital. He doesn't begin to gather weapon and warfare materials, but rather goes to people who had been rejected, people who were on one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

That's where Jesus begins his kingdom. And so Simon and Andrew and James and John call, follow Jesus, follow Jesus's call. And they see Jesus cast out a spirit in the synagogue.

[2 : 20] Jesus isn't like his cousin John, who stayed on the banks of the Jordan, who stayed in the wilderness. Rather, Jesus goes to the center of the Jewish social and political and religious and familial life.

The synagogue goes and declares that the kingdom of God has come and shows us that by casting out a demon. And we're going to spend, we have lots of time in the book of Mark, so we'll spend some time talking about what demons are and spiritual oppression and all of that.

But Jesus is basically saying, you know that the kingdom of God is showing up because I am going to these powers of darkness and pushing them back. So we get to verse 29.

This is our passage for tonight. And it says this, As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.

Let's stop right there for a second. I don't often have the opportunity to chide you, which is good because Table Church is one of the most beautiful, lovely churches that I and my family have ever gotten to be a part of.

[3 : 26] I've told you this many, many times that throughout the past 18 months, there's no church I would rather have been a part of because every chance that you have gotten, you have responded in ways that bend towards love and justice.

And I'm proud of that. I really don't have anything to do with it. Because you all were kind of like this before I showed up. So well done. But the past month or so, more than one, less than five, so a few folks have all had a similar comment to me, which has been somewhere along the lines of, hey, I

came on a Sunday morning or an evening.

I came to the Table Church. I've been watching online. I love the preaching. I love the music. I love what you guys are up to. But you're not all that friendly. Which kind of makes me shudder.

Now, I've been told that in the before times, before I was the pastor, before COVID, all of that, that that was not the Table Church's reputation. That you all had a reputation of being a very friendly bunch.

That when someone came, you recognized them, you saw them. Oh, you're new. Let me invite you to brunch or to dinner or a snack or something. And that was like a very natural reflex for y'all.

[4 : 39] And now I know COVID makes that complicated. Because now we have to like do all these weird social dances. We're like, you put out your hand. But oh, maybe you don't want a handshake. But they put out your hand. So you do it. Like you have all of that. You don't know what people's like personal bubbles are.

And how like COVID conscious they are. And how COVID conscious you are. You have to do all this like social calculus constantly. And I hate calculus. I was very bad at it. So when you apply it to social situations, I get it.

It's hard. So someone comes to the Table Church and you're like, well, we've all been apart for X amount of days, weeks, months. And I don't know if I recognize them.

They've got a mask on. And I don't know. Like maybe they're new or maybe they've been coming. But I just haven't come. And so like we all have to figure this out together. I get it. So my encouragement to you, chiding I suppose, is to like lean towards the assumption that someone wants you to say hello.

My encouragement, even for tonight, is we're going to do communion. We're going to go outside. We're going to take communion together. Those first three, four minutes after the end of the service, after we take the body and the blood outside in a big circle, is don't gravitate towards the people you know already.

[5 : 50] Gravitate towards the people you don't know. Which should be, you know, slightly easier to figure out because we'll be outside and we can take some masks off and stuff like that. And then the question to ask, this is my like key advice as a pastor, don't ask someone, are you new to the table church?

Because if, you know, if you're like me and I ask you, are you new to the table church? You'll probably respond like, no, I've been going here four years, you dummy. Who the heck are you? So instead, the question is not, are you new, but rather, how long have you been coming to the table church?

And then they can say four years, or they can say this is my first time, and then you can take it from there. Good advice? Good advice. All right. So the reason I point this out is that Simon, Andrew, James, John, they follow Jesus.

We get this picture of them like dropping everything and then following Jesus, and that's like it, as if they abandoned their entire lives. That's not quite the image. They follow Jesus into the synagogue. Jesus confronts the powers of darkness that have been manifested in this demon-possessed person, and then they invite Jesus back to their home. So they still have a home. They still have resources that they can use to host Jesus.

[6 : 57] So they leave the synagogue with James and John, the home of Simon and Andrew. They're invitational. They're being hospitable. This is what I'm encouraging you to do tonight. And we see that in a first-century Jewish home, it was kind of built like, imagine row houses, all kind of built in a square with a courtyard in the middle.

But except it wasn't just like real estate where you're buying and trading, you may not know your neighbors. Rather is I get married, and then I move in with my in-laws, and then I have kids, and they move in next door to me, and then they get married to someone's third or fourth cousin, and they move in next door to them.

And so it's this extended family, like an oikos is the Greek word, 70, 80 people who all kind of have a shared relationship together, and they have these large homes. Maybe you knock down a wall so you have easier access to your ailing parents.

You have a courtyard in the middle where you keep your livestock or your grain, things like that. So they invite Jesus back into Simon and Andrew's home, and Simon has a mother-in-law who is sick. And the only way that I'm aware of to get a mother-in-law is to get married. Simon has a wife. He has a mother-in-law. He's got a family. We often picture Jesus and the disciples as just like Jesus

and 12 dudes.

[8 : 11] But no, there are families involved. In the book of Luke, we see Jesus commission 70 to go out into mission, and that's about the size of 12 apostles plus their families. So you picture the Last Supper, like Da Vinci with Jesus in the middle and the 12 surrounding him.

One of them is maybe Mary Magdalene according to the Da Vinci Code. But rather, it's nothing like that at all. It's a big upper room with kids and wives and mothers-in-laws all just like running around, being rambunctious together.

That's the scene. So Jesus gets invited back to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. And he immediately told Jesus about her.

Now, we can already tell that something is up because the mother-in-law wasn't at synagogue.

When you're sick, remember, they didn't have a germ theory of disease in the first century.

That wouldn't be for another 18 centuries later. When you were sick, you were ostracized, not because of sneezes and coughs, but because of the idea that there is something impure and unclean about you.

[9 : 17] In our modern society, we very much separate the physical and the spiritual, but that's nonsense from a Jewish point of view. They are mingling together two sides of the same coin.

And so if you've got a fever, there's not just something wrong with your body, there must be something wrong with your soul as well. And so Simon's mother-in-law, Simon's wife's mom, has not been allowed to go to synagogue.

Jesus gets invited into her home and only then meets the mother-in-law. So they tell Jesus about her. Now, if you have invited the local rabbi into your home, you might mention the mother-in-law, but she'd be locked away in a different room because you don't want the contagion of the sickness and the impurity to affect the rabbi.

But Jesus does something different. Jesus went to her. This blows right over our heads, but this is unusual behavior. Rabbis don't go to sick people unless they're willing to get unclean themselves. Jesus goes to her, touches her, takes her by the hand, and helps her up. Jesus, rather than being contaminated by the sickness and the social impurity, the social ostracization of this woman, rather Jesus has a contagion of purity, a contagion of holiness, a contagion of wholeness and healing.

[10 : 46] Jesus is contagious in all the good ways. He goes to her, takes her by the hand, and then helps her up. And the fever leaves her.

Now, again, kind of weird language. It's not exactly how we talk about sickness today. We don't usually talk about sicknesses leaving. But again, physical, spiritual, very much connected in the Jewish worldview.

And so a fever leaves her because it's very much like the same thing that Jesus does when he casts out or rebukes a demon. The fever leaves her because whatever had her be contagious, whatever had her be impure, is gone, is sent away.

It can't stand in the presence of Jesus. And so it exits the scene. The fever leaves her and she began to wait on them, to serve them.

Now, I put this question up on Instagram, on the Table Church's account, with this passage, saying what questions you have about this account. And all of the lady types were all up in arms about this part.

[11 : 49] She's been sick. She had a fever. And the first thing she has to do is get up and wait on them? What the heck? The feminists are upset. Probably as you should be.

I'm not going to go through that. But there's a couple things going on here. Number one, the idea of this woman getting up and immediately starting serving may be Mark's way of showing us that when Jesus heals someone, it's not like the next day after you're sick and you kind of feel a little groggy and a little bit better and you kind of just like force yourself to get back to work because you're technically better, but you really could use like another day of sleep.

No, when Jesus heals someone, it's immediate, it's instant, and it brings them back to 100% themselves. And so a woman in the first century who has the rabbi in her home is of course going to be like, I feel great.

I got to do the thing that I ought to do, which is to get the meal ready, to prepare the house. That could be what Mark is talking about, but I think there's something else going on. The word for serve here is the word deaconos.

Let me hear you say deaconos. Deaconos, it's where we get the word deacon. Deacon, big, nice churchy word that usually has something to do with like the people set aside in the church to serve the poor or the hungry or the material needs of the church in some way.

[13:01] You have elders and you have deacons. And it means to serve, to minister. Now this word is used entirely three times in the book of Mark. It's used earlier in this first chapter about Jesus being in the wilderness and he's tempted and he's fasted.

And then after the temptation, angels come to deacon him, to serve or to minister to him. So it's used once there. It's used a second time here about Simon's mother-in-law who is made well and immediately gets up to deacon Jesus, to serve Jesus and the disciples.

And it's used a third and final time in the book of Mark. Can anybody guess who gets this word applied to them? It's a good Sunday school answer. Jesus.

Book of Mark quotes Jesus as saying, the son of man, how Jesus refers to himself, did not come into the world to be served, but to serve.

Now Mark has an agenda that we're going to see time and again in this gospel about turning expectations upside down on their head. The phrase, the son of God, is used at the very beginning.

[14:11] The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the son of God. And the narrator knows that Jesus is the son of God. The demons who Jesus cast out knows that Jesus is the son of God.

And there's only one other person in the book of Mark who knows that Jesus is the son of God. And that's the centurion who is standing over the crucifixion. It's not the disciples who declare that Jesus is the son of God.

It's not other followers of Jesus. It's the centurion, the Roman, the enemy of the empire. That's the one who gets it. In the same way, it's not the disciples who know that they're meant to serve.

It's not the disciples who are called to imitate Rabbi Jesus and who get it. We'll see time and again that the disciples are often the ones who don't get it. Rather, the only person, human being, who successfully imitates the way of Jesus, who came into the world not to be served, but to serve, is this woman.

And so it may be slightly patriarchal or misogynistic, or it could be Mark's way of saying, you want to follow the way of Jesus? The disciples are going to fail you time and again at showing you how, but this woman who's healed by Jesus, she gets it.

[15:21] And that may come as a surprise to a first century reader who expects women to not get it. But certainly we don't think that way today. So, Jesus goes to her, takes her by the hand, helps her up, the fever leaves her, and she began to wait to serve, to minister for them.

And that evening, after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. Now, the thing I love about the book of Mark is there is this constant essence of speed going on in the book because Jesus comes to Capernaum.

He goes to the synagogue. He begins to teach. He kicks out the demon. Then he immediately goes into the house and he immediately heals Simon's mother-in-law. And then, sunset comes and immediately people begin to bring Jesus, all the ill and demon-possessed, in the city.

Capernaum's a city of about 1,700 people at the time. And there's maybe a little bit of hyperbole here about the whole town gathering at the door, but we get this idea that there's excitement about the rabbi, Jesus, who has got something different going on than all the teachers who have come before.

Now, if you're a first century person and you've got this compound of houses with a courtyard in the middle, they were built like this for a reason. They were built as a defensive complex because it was always sort of a question of whether an invasion might come or maybe robbers or brigands or revolutionaries might come and try to get into your home.

[16:59] And so you would lock the doors, close the windows, get into the courtyard and that would be your defensive position. So when the sunset comes, that's when you close doors, you close windows and you go to bed.

But that's not what Jesus encourages here in Simon and Andrew's house. At the evening, that evening after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. If you're the mother-in-law, if you're Simon and Andrew who invited the rabbi and you see Jesus start inviting all of the city's, you know, people that they want to exclude, you're going to be a little upset and worried.

Jesus, what are you doing? We're supposed to be locking up right now and now you're taking all the weirdos and inviting them inside. Remember what we said about the sick and the demon-possessed. It's not just a physical thing, it's a spiritual thing.

It's not just like, oh, germ theory of disease. Rather, it's, oh, there must be something spiritually wrong with you. You must have upset God some way. You must be impure or unclean in some way. So to have the sick and the demon-possessed be invited into your home is to take the purpose of the home and ignore it, to turn it upside down, a phrase you're going to get sick of me saying, to turn expectations on their head and to do the opposite because that's the kind of Jesus that we serve.

In the city that we lived in before we lived here in northwest Iowa, we had like, we didn't have next door, but we had like Facebook groups for the city. And there was like a week where a gentleman had been recently released out of jail, the county jail, and immediately kind of relapsed into some addiction, addictive behaviors, and probably had some mental illness going on as well.

[18:38] And so the Facebook groups were all at Twitter about the anxiety and worry about this gentleman who was wandering around town, muttering to himself, clearly high or intoxicated on something, and about all the ways that we need to be anxious and stressed about this person.

He would wander through yards and all of that. And one night, I get a call from a small group that was meeting in our church building. And that gentleman had wandered into the church.

Now, there are two ways that the small group could have responded. They could have responded in that anxious way that all the Facebook groups had responded. Call the cops, spread the word on social media to avoid this person.

But that's not what the small group did. Rather, they invited him in. They said, hey, it looks like you might be a little hungry. Can we offer you some of the food that we're eating? Hey, it looks like you might be a little confused and maybe on something right now.

Can we offer you a place to sit or to lie down? They called in. One of the people who was part of the small group was a medical professional who could get them the help that they needed and make sure that they got connected with someone who can help them.

[19:42] Now, I love this story because it's a beautiful story of what the church ought to look like. The sick, those who struggle wandering into a church building and finding the help they need.

But I also kind of hate this story because it's far too rare. The church too often has a reputation of having doors locked, having windows closed, of it being the last place that someone who is struggling or down and out might show up at.

Now, I feel like the table church might be beginning to turn that reputation of the capital C church around, but we have a long ways to go. This passage convicts me because I've got locks on my doors and my windows and I've got a security system and I know how to use it.

And I look at a story of Jesus who is going into the disciples' home, offering healing, and then taking the place that should be, the refuge, the castle of strength, and inverting it, saying, what if this became a hospital and said?

If Jesus did that to my house, I'd be a little upset. I imagine he might be as well. But Jesus invites us into a different kind of kingdom, a kingdom that does not exist for our own sake, but rather for the sake of others.

[20:55] As Bishop William Temple has said, the church is an organization that exists not for the sake of its members, but its non-members. And Jesus shows us that when he enters Simon in Andrew's house.

He takes the expectations and turns them. So that evening after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed, and the whole town gathered at the door.

What does Jesus do? Jesus healed many who had various diseases. And he also drove out many demons. The book of Mark, the gospel, shows us what it looks like when God shows up on planet Earth.

Like the 90s song of old, what if God were one of us? That's what this is answering. Now, there were attempts to answer this question throughout the Hebrew Scriptures as well.

When God shows up, God will rend the mountains, the oceans will boil, the mountains will be melted down like wax, and the judgment and the wrath of God will come. And then the gospel of Mark comes along and says, yes, God will show up.

[21:59] God has shown up in Jesus. And Jesus is going to show us what judgment and wrath looks like, but it's not what we expect. It's about casting out the powers of darkness.

It's about offering forgiveness and healing. And the God that we were so anxious about is now a God who shows us comfort. What if God were one of us?

God would then show up in the town, turn our homes of refuge into hospitals, and begin healing and casting out many demons. The church and our homes ought to be wanting to imitate this way.

And yes, I know we can talk about boundaries, we can talk about safety and wisdom, there's an idealistic picture that I know that we can't live up to and I don't expect us to. But I also think that when we talk about boundaries and principles and wisdom and all of that, there can be, at least for me, I'll speak for myself, a way that becomes an excuse to never have to encounter those who make me uncomfortable.

And I think Jesus would say, maybe we can do better. And then it says, verse 34, last half of it, Jesus would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

[23 : 17] So this actually happens quite a few times in the Gospel of Mark where somebody knows who Jesus is, the Son of God, the Messiah, usually spiritual beings like these demons.

And Jesus says, don't tell anyone or Jesus will do a miraculous healing and tell them, tell no one what happened. Now, why would Jesus do this? If God has shown up on the scene, why wouldn't God in the person of Jesus want everybody to know?

Well, as we talked about in the beginning of this series, there were expectations about what the Messiah would be like. Jesus was not the first person to show up and be either called or call himself Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One.

There had been others who had come before Jesus saying, I am the Messiah, I am the Christ, I am the Anointed One of God, I am the King that has been promised to come that will deliver Israel. And they take all of their expectations and they begin to act them out.

They go out to the wilderness and they call an army for themselves and they start gathering swords and then they march on Jerusalem and they are immediately killed by Rome because that's what happens when you march on the Roman Empire.

[24 : 26] The messianic expectations of the first century were about a Messiah who would come and be like all the kings who had come before. They would gather armies, they would levy taxes and they would try to cast out enemies by bloodshed and violence.

So then Jesus comes who, spoiler alert, is the actual Messiah, is actually God in the flesh and Jesus knows that if he goes around saying, hey, it's me, the Messiah, all of those false, bad expectations are going to get lumped onto him and they're going to start trying to make him into a king that Jesus has no desire to be.

Not that kind of king in the way. And so Jesus starts doing Messiah work, casting out demons, feeding people, healing people, gathering disciples to imitate his way of love and justice and says, and keep it on the DL for now.

Because I don't want your bad expectations to get applied to me. Jesus has a mission that Jesus is aware of is going to conclude in Jerusalem when he starts stopping the temple from functioning, turning over tables to the point that it's eventually going to get him executed.

Jesus knows that, but he has some stuff to do beforehand. And so he's not going to start riling up all of the authorities and get him killed too early. Because if someone goes wandering around saying, I'm the king of the Jews, I'm going to overthrow Rome, but in a way you don't expect, well, it's probably going to lead you to an early death.

[26 : 02] And we see that it does, but Jesus is trying to hold that off for a couple of years. So the demons know that he's the Messiah, the son of God, God in the flesh, and Jesus says, be quiet.

I don't need anybody to know that yet. It's what scholars refer to as the messianic secret, the recurring theme throughout Mark and the rest of the Gospels, that Jesus is trying to keep his mission quiet for now until his time has come.

So Jesus shows up at Simon and Andrew's home. He brings healing, restoration. The mother-in-law shows us what a true disciple looks like as she imitates Jesus in the way of service. And at sunset, when everyone's supposed to go to bed and lock their doors, Jesus turns homes into hospitals, begins offering healing, driving out the powers of darkness and saying, shh, keep it on the DL.

My time is not yet coming. As I look at this passage, I'm challenged in a couple of ways. One, few of us have experienced a church that functions like this, that can bring healing, that can cast out systems of oppression and darkness and evil in a way as effective as Jesus has.

[27 : 26] Few of us have encountered churches and lives that have been so abandoned and dedicated to the power and to the will of God that when they move, evil shudders.

And that makes me sad, to be honest, that so few of us have encountered that, have given ourselves to it or have seen it in action. But I'm also reminded that if we were there, if we were watching all of this happen, it may not look like the kind of movie exorcisms and miraculousness that we might expect.

I wonder if we were there, what it might look like to us is pulling up another chair at the table, inviting someone else in at the door, of exorcism, of getting rid of the demons and the power of darkness in someone's life is merely through the action of saying, hey, I know that you've been kicked out and left out and ostracized and that's going to stop today and that the demons might flee at just those words.

And so that gives me a sense of hope that rather than try to put these extraordinary supernatural expectations on ourselves and our churches and our worship services, rather we should begin with much more ordinary expectations of ourselves to instead maybe make a slightly larger pot of soup and bake a slightly larger loaf of bread and to invite maybe one or two more people than we might be comfortable with otherwise into our homes, into our lives, into our social circles so that we might learn from them, so that we might hear their story, so that we might as the church push away the powers of evil and darkness that keep away and divide and separate and leave people outside in the cold and rather we become the church that includes and brings healing and makes friends out of strangers.

I think that sort of ordinary work is what makes manifest, makes real, makes tangible, makes physical the extraordinary kingdom of God.

[29 : 39] things like 6 months and that's why it's figuring out the power of being up, and it's going to be short, and there's those