

We're still in the first chapter of Mark. If we were watching a Netflix series, we'd only be partway through season 1. The visual sequence at the start of today's episode would remind us of what has gone before:

- John Baptist proclaiming a baptism of the heart's transformation
- the divine proclamation when Jesus is baptized, that he is beloved, the one in whom God delights
- the confrontation in the wilderness as Jesus is tempted by the Accuser
- Peter, Andrew, James and John hearing Jesus invitation and leaving their fishing business on the Sea of Galilee to go with him
- and then, last week's episode... Jesus calling the unclean spirit out of one of the members of the congregation

Today's episode continues in Capernaum, as Jesus and his followers walk a very short distance from the synagogue over to Peter and Andrew's house. It will be Jesus' home base when he is in Galilee. Capernaum was a border town near the imperial highway and the mouth of the Jordan River; a detachment of Roman centurions was posted there.

Gordon and I were given the opportunity to visit the archeological site of today's gospel in March 1997. An aerial photograph shows the synagogue, Peter's house, a stand of trees and the shore - all in a line, a distance less than the length of this block of Nicola St.

On the shore, I found this rock, which gives you an idea of the colour of so many of the buildings in the area. That shore, so close to Peter's house, could well be the place where the disciples first met Jesus and where they saw Jesus again, after the events of Holy Week, when he called to them in their boats, and where he prepared breakfast for them.

This stone makes me think of pita bread stuffed with fish. I'll pass it around, so you can hold it a moment and pass it on. A touchstone.

The archeological site reveals different layers of history. There has been some restoration of the 4th century synagogue built on the site which gives a sense of the splendour of this building. And underneath this 4th c. Synagogue were found the remnants of the much earlier synagogue where Jesus taught. Just 30 metres away, towards the lake, are the remains of a 5th c. octagonal church. What you see at the site are the outline in stone foundations of that 5th century church, and of a much earlier, late 1st c. renovation of Peter and Andrew's original house. It is thought that their house was adapted to be used for gatherings of Jesus' followers as early as the year 75. The wall inscriptions and oil lamps found include the name of Jesus, the titles Christ, Lord, the Most High, and God, and also liturgical expressions, Amen, Kyrie Eleison. Archeologists describe finding a long inscription that seems to refer to the eucharist. Peter's name is found also. The number of different languages found suggests that pilgrims visited. Amazingly, we also have the journal of a 4th century pilgrim to the holy land, Egeria, and she wrote: "The house of the prince of the apostles in Capernaum was changed into a church; the walls however of that church are still standing as they were in the past." That's the house Jesus went to from the synagogue, just as Jews who chose to follow his way would do in years to come.

What we know about Mark is just as old. He was described at the end of the 1st century by Bishop Irenaeus as "the disciple and interpreter of Peter, and after the deaths of Peter (c.65 AD) and Paul (c.67 AD) he handed down to us in writing the things that Peter proclaimed." Another bishop at that time, Papias, wrote that Mark was the interpreter of Peter, and "set down

accurately, though not in order, everything that Peter remembered of the words and actions of the Lord.”

And here we are, today, listening to Mark’s words in our gathering place at 4th and Nicola in Kamloops, not far from the Trans Canada highway, near an ancient salmon fishery, doing much the same thing as was done in Peter’s house in Capernaum.

One of the earliest detailed descriptions of a celebration of the eucharist that we have was written by Justin Martyr in 150. He describes the Sunday gathering of the community and the reading of the memoirs of the apostles and prophets, “for as long as time permits. Then the reader ceases, and the presider speaks, admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples. Then we arise all together and offer prayers; and when we have concluded our prayers, bread is brought forward, and wine and water. The presider offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability and the people give assent by saying Amen. The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons carry a portion to those who are absent. The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the presider, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need. We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day Jesus Christ rose from the dead.”

Our liturgy follows that same ancient pattern and is still centred on the telling of the story, week by week. My favourite Canadian theologian Paul

Gibson explains: “We tell this story over and over again so that the story may become part of us and we may become part of the story, *because the story is not over.*”

And “we preach because the story has not ended. Our readings are not just to link us with the past but to open the pathway of the Spirit before us. The task of the preacher is to open that door to the future and enable the old version of the story to illuminate the story which has yet to be told, yet to be lived.”

I think that’s what Mark is trying to tell us too.

Mark tells us that after a long evening of healing when the Sabbath had ended, Jesus had risen on the Sunday morning while it was still very dark. Doesn’t that ring a bell? And it is supposed to! The Easter resurrection bell. The same words are used here at the beginning of the story. And the same bell is rung when Mark tells us that “Jesus came and took Peter’s mother in law by the hand and raised her up”.

When I go to sleep and when I wake up, I can see on the wall of our room an icon I brought home from the holy land showing Jesus reaching down, taking those trapped in hell by the hand and raising them up to life.

The community of followers, gathered for eucharist in Peter’s house in Capernaum, needed to hear that resurrection reminder, and so do we.

Creator sets free. That is the meaning of Jesus’ name and that is the proclamation of the kingdom he tells Peter and Andrew and James and John that he must make in other towns. And at the very end of Mark’s gospel, that is the good news he sends his followers to share: “Go forth into all the world, proclaim the good news to all creation.”

Clearly as followers of Jesus today we are meant to be sharing the good news of God’s kingdom. The story isn’t over, and we are part of it. We may

not be clear about our role in the healing of various diseases and the casting out of demons. Just hearing those words makes us uncomfortable. But to see powers at work in our world destroying life, diminishing life; and to see how persons and communities are entrapped, that should and does make us uncomfortable. We may not use the same language as our ancestors in Capernaum, but there are anxieties and deep wounds in our common life here and now – various addictions and systemic injustices, that we need to pay attention to and reflect together on what it is we might do to help bring healing.

We know that God's intention is to free all persons from what entraps them - to take those trapped in hell by the hand and raise them up to life in all its fullness. And we know that love is the way we do that. We can trust that God equips our faith community, here at the corner of 4th and Nicola, with the gifts needed. There is a power beyond our own, that is more than we can ask or imagine, that's available to each of us in this very moment, that is transformative. We are surrounded and upheld by the communion of followers of Jesus through the ages, our ancestors in the faith, as we prayerfully seek the wisdom and discernment, the faith, hope and love we need, to follow, and to do, and be what Jesus asks of us.

Thanks be to God.