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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Mark 14:17-31

26 June 2022

Walking Away from the Table

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray: God of invitation, may your table provide the space for each of us to hear you more clearly and follow you more closely. May we walk away from your table changed and prepared for the road that continues before us. Fill us with your Spirit as we join you around the table this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

Message:

In the middle of May, my family and I drove out to Elkhart for a two-week seminary course in-person. It was called Biblical Storytelling, and the focus of our time together was renewing or refreshing our ears and eyes to the story that each book of our current Bible is trying to tell. Specifically, we focused on the book of Mark and its telling of the story of the life and teaching of Jesus. Beyond the gospel of Mark, we also reflected upon the ways, in which we have been taught to tell or not tell stories. Some in my class had learned early in their lives that their stories and voices were not as important as others so they often were quiet and soft-spoken and learning to bring volume and extra space to their voice and physical presence as they told a story. Some others needed time to unlearn the ways that they had heard or read stories in church in order to hear them with fresh ears to how the gospel may have been first heard. For me, I realized during our time together that possibly because I was the fourth of five boys in a boisterous family space,

I had learned to be louder and even more enthusiastic in my storytelling than I needed to be, so some of my challenge in the two weeks was learning to be smaller and tell my story simply, though still packed with the energy and passion that I felt about the scriptures. We exercised our voices and bodies in ways that made us more aware of all of the ways that we can communicate with our audience.

Specifically, as my seminary class journeyed through the gospel of Mark during those two weeks, we began to hear the story anew. Mark's gospel in the first-century was like a present-day movie. When it was first written, it would have been memorized and carried to communities of people around the Roman Empire as a listening experience. It takes about two hours to read or tell Mark's story in its entirety. There were no copiers or printing presses, no publishing houses or editors to make finishing touches on its first draft. The story would have been written on a particular scroll and then memorized in its entirety to be shared around the table or in a small group. Mark's story is meant to be heard, maybe even in a little bit of a rushed and out-of-breath kind of way.

When we come to Mark 14, a listening audience would have been very aware that the end of the story was near. Jesus is in the heart of enemy territory as he shares this Passover meal with his disciples. Mark forms a sandwich around Jesus's words at the table. The sandwich is Mark's classic way of highlighting for the audience what is most important at that moment in the story while also reminding them of the context, of all that is swirling around that moment in the story. The center of our sandwich then is Jesus's institution of his last supper or of the new covenant that will be fulfilled in his death on the cross. The buns that form the top and bottom of the sandwich then are his truthful predictions of how the disciples will respond when it seems that the Jesus's whole ministry is falling apart. First, one of them will betray him, one of his closest

friends. Not only that, but once the betrayer has been revealed, the rest will desert him. Of course, the disciples passionately object, saying that they will not leave Jesus, even to the point of Peter saying that he will die with Jesus before he would ever deny him. Mark's sandwich at this time in the story shows us how lonely the road will be to what will seem like Jesus's end, but it also centers us in Jesus's words at the table, words that will sustain the community once Jesus is gone after he has been raised from the dead. While the disciples may enjoy their place of privilege around the table in this intimate moment with their teacher, they will walk away from the table and show by their actions how difficult the call of Jesus is to listen and follow.

At this moment, I identify most with the disciples. We will take communion together this morning, a reminder of the kind of teacher, king, lord, and savior that we worship, one who nonviolently sacrifices his body and blood for the sake of his followers and the world. We will all be challenged by the example that Jesus lays before us as he does every time that we come to this table: will we follow in his way of offering ourselves for the sake of our neighbors and our enemies? Our resolve and commitment will be challenged, not at the table as we enjoy the presence of our savior, but when we walk away, when we leave the table behind. We might passionately tell Jesus at the table that we would never betray or desert him, but it is when we have been met with the fullness of the brokenness of our world as the disciples were that we will know what we are really made of. Not long after Jesus makes his predictions, Judas Iscariot does betray him to the Jerusalem authorities, and the rest of the disciples all flee from those who come to arrest Jesus in the garden.

The challenge is before you today as it is every time that we come to the communion table. How will this moment at the table change the ways that you walk away and engage with the world around you? How will your time at Jesus' table transform you and empower you?