

Sunday July 7, 2024

FIRST LESSON: 1 Peter 2:2–3

GOSPEL READING: Mark 6: 1–13

Sermon Series: Read the Story: The Preface Matters

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Good morning Beloved Community.

- Today, we are beginning a 12-week journey through the sermon series "**Read the Story**," focusing on the profound lessons found in the first epistle of Peter, tying in new gospels lessons each week beginning with the Gospel of Mark.
- The passion and inspiration behind this sermon series is to invite us all into a special time of discernment and learning, so that we are better equipped to navigate this maze of a world filled with so many social issues, current events, affairs and more!
- For I stopped by to proclaim that **reading the story** is not a passive act; it is a transformative journey.
- It invites you and I to engage with the world around us with open hearts and minds.
- **Reading the story** challenges us to seek truth, practice justice, and extend love.

- In every aspect of life—history, politics, faith, family and personal relationships—**reading the story** equips you and I to live with purpose and integrity.
- We live in a fast-paced world where it is easy to overlook the importance of understanding the full narrative of our lives, our history, and our faith.
- Yet, to truly grasp the essence of **who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed**, it is imperative that we "**read the story.**"
- **Reading the story** holds profound significance in every aspect of our lives, in that by doing so, we embrace God and loving our neighbors that much better.
- Finally, **reading the story** as I bring our first lesson of 1 Peter 2: 2-3 into sharper focus, is ideally something I am proclaiming that we should crave to do in our every day lives.
- For I have discovered in life that what meets the eye is not always what is able to be fully seen.
- There is inevitably some important detail that one can easily miss or overlook as it pertains to how we see one another and the world that surrounds us.
- Which is why in our first week of our conversation together, I am placing a key instruction of consideration

for us as that in our **reading of the story, we take the time to read the preface too!**

- Raise your hand if any of you have ever been guilty of skipping the preface of a book and instead choosing to start with chapter one.
- I am so guilty of this...especially in my academic career—I had to learn how to train myself to read the preface of the book.
- **This is because the preface matters Church family!**
- It sets the stage, provides direction, and reminds us of our foundation.
- As we all just came off from celebrating the Fourth of July, this week, we are reminded of the preface to our nation's story—the **Declaration of Independence**.
- This preface set the stage for what was to come, outlining the principles and vision that would guide a new nation.
- However, I would be remised if I did not name that there is a preface to even this preface, hence the inclusion of the new holiday of Juneteenth that occurred on June 19th.
- While the Fourth of July marks the declaration of independence from colonial rule, Juneteenth celebrates the liberation of a significant portion of its people from enslavement.

- Therefore, Juneteenth and the Fourth of July together tell a more complete story of America's pursuit of freedom.
- **Together, these holidays underscore** the principles of freedom and equality that must apply to all individuals.
- By embracing both holidays, we honor the spirit of resilience, hope, and progress.
- We recognize the importance of continuing the struggle for civil rights and social justice.
- We are reminded that the true celebration of independence involves a commitment to the ongoing work of ensuring freedom and equality for all.
- Similarly, the preface to our scriptural lessons matters as well!
- In our scripture from 1 Peter for starters, we are urged to crave pure spiritual milk, much like newborn infants.
- This analogy emphasizes the importance of starting with the basics, the foundational truths of our faith, to grow into salvation.
- Peter's audience, scattered and facing persecution, needed to be reminded of these foundational truths to persevere and mature in their faith.
- I believe in today's world we too need to be reminded of our foundation.

- This is one of the main reasons why in our Church, we aim to have small groups that hopefully ignites and awakens a spiritual hunger from within through our sharing together in community and learning.
- **Our gospel reading from Mark 6 provides a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry where the preface is to understand that Jesus was returning to His hometown—however he was not entering into a welcome home party with fireworks and bbq as some of us had the pleasure of partaking in this week.**
- Instead, Jesus was entering into a rather hostile environment met with skepticism and disbelief.

- In our gospel lesson, Jesus returns to Nazareth, accompanied by His disciples.
- On the Sabbath, He teaches in the synagogue, and the townspeople are initially astonished by His wisdom and miracles.
- However, their amazement quickly turns to skepticism and offense. They question His authority, pointing out His familiar origins—"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mark 6:3).
- This reaction is significant. The people of Nazareth see Jesus through the lens of His past, unable to reconcile the extraordinary works with the ordinary man they knew.
- **Their refusal to read the preface—to understand the foundational truths of Jesus' identity and mission—leads to their unbelief.**
- Consequently, Jesus could do few miracles there, "except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them" (Mark 6:5).
- Despite the rejection, Jesus continues His mission, sending out the twelve disciples two by two.
- Jesus gives them authority over unclean spirits and instructs them to travel lightly—no bread, no bag, no money, only a staff and sandals.

- They are to stay where they are welcomed and leave places that reject them, shaking off the dust from their feet as a testimony against those towns.
- This passage ultimately **serves as a preface** to the disciples' mission, emphasizing the need for faith, reliance on God, and the authority given to them to cast out demons and heal the sick.
- Therefore the take away for us all to consider this morning is that the skepticism of Jesus' hometown serves as a cautionary tale to us all.
- Just as the people of Nazareth **missed out** on the blessings of Jesus' ministry due to their preconceived notions and choice to skip the preface of Jesus' teachings, **we too can miss out;**
- **We can miss out on** our blessings.
- **We can miss out on** our breakthroughs.
- **We can miss out on** making invaluable connections with others.
- **We can miss out on** some important opportunities that will only further fulfill our life purpose.
- And I don't know about you Church family, but the older I get, the more that I fear missing out....FOMO.
- One of the saddest days of my life to date is looking at my late father's face who has been gone from this Earth for 10 years in August due to pancreatic cancer, once

he realized that **he would miss out** on his opportunity to grow old with my mother, to see how his grandchildren would thrive, to meet his son-in-law face to face, and to see his adult children live on to be who we are called to be.

- My father was not afraid to die, but he was indeed afraid to miss out.
- Although I believe that my father is with Jesus and I will see him again—I would be remised if I did not name the profound loss a person can feel when **they have missed out** on an opportunity.
- I would be further remised if I did not share a piece of my justice heart when I think about all of the people **who missed out** because of not having their essential needs met or because of having their human rights taken away from them.
- This is especially why the preface matters to me!
- **The preface matters** as we approach one of the most crucial election seasons I suspect this country will ever face.
- **The preface matters** because everything that Juneteenth and The 4th of July strived to create by way of freedom is at stake for all of us— so we must get out and vote when the time comes!
- **The preface matters** for our children,

- **The preface matters** for our community,
- **The preface matters** for our world.
- All things work together for good to them that love the Spirit of Truth, to them who are called according to God's purpose.....
- However, we must be there to see these things unfold!
- Don't miss out!
- **Amen and Hallelujah**