



Tuesday's Pondering: Tuesday September 3, 2024.
Verse 16...

Do you remember these words? “A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. That’s a signpost up ahead. Your next stop: *The Twilight Zone*.” That’s how I feel about the bible sometimes. It has so many wonderful mysteries.

Since I was a teenager, I have been fascinated with our scriptures, Hebrew, and Greek. And I have studied our scriptures through the last 25 years in university. There is so much to learn and there’s been so much I didn’t have a clue about when I was young. So, when I find something interesting, I just have to search for why. And sometimes it means I enter *The Twilight Zone*. Or at least in my imagination, that is. But I look for answers.

On Sunday I mentioned during the announcements that Mark 7:16 is not in all our bibles. It is missing in the NIV, the NRSV, the NRSVUE, for a start. There is just no verse 16, even in my French bible. It goes from verse 15 to 17. Are you curious? To understand why, we have to go back to understand the way the bible has come down to us today.

First, there was not one bible from which copies were made and handed down. Nope. There were many books floating around in the first few centuries and because there were no photocopiers, they were copied by hand by scribes. Humans. And humans make mistakes and humans like to amend and clarify for others too.

None of the original manuscripts of the New Testament exist, or for that matter, neither do direct copies. But there are manuscripts that have survived and can be dated. Because there are many copies, they can be grouped by commonalities, called ‘families.’ For example, sometimes the family might be from a region. Translations by families are then compared. But none of them are the originals. They are copies, of copies, of copies, made by ancient scribes. And the ancient scribes sometimes amended as they copied. That’s where Mark 7:16 comes in, along with another 15 other verses that are not in all of our New Testaments.

Now this isn’t about *interpretation*, meaning how someone understands a verse in its ancient context and for today. And this isn’t about *translation*, meaning how someone chooses which English or French or whatever word will best equate with the ancient Greek word. This is a case of *interpolation*, meaning some words were added later by a scribe, perhaps starting as a note in the margin that later got picked up by another scribe and put into the text itself. Mark 7:16 is not in many of the oldest versions of the ancient manuscripts of our bibles. Somewhere, sometime, verse sixteen is believed to have been added to a family, or version of the New Testament.

So, for example, Codex Sinaiticus, from the 4th or 5th century AD, *does not* have verse 16. Codex Vaticanus, from the 4th century, *does not* have verse 16. A codex is a bound book and was first made around 100 AD. Codex Alexandrinus, from the 5th century, *does* have verse 16. The Washington manuscript from the 5th century *does* have verse 16. The versions

of our bibles today will or won't have verse 16 depending on the sources the scholars chose to use and their beliefs about the sources. Verse 16 is not in the New International Version, but it is in the King James. It is not in the New American Standard Version, but it is in the New Jerusalem. To understand more, read the beginning pages of your bibles that tell you about the scholars who made your version and the sources they used, how and why.

If we don't notice the number 16 missing from the sequence of verses, we don't notice the omission of the verse. And when it is there, we just read it normally. This is how it goes for a single verse, but if there is a large number of verses that appear in some versions, and not others, then they are bracketed with one or two vertical bars to indicate the *interpolation*, meaning the addition of the verses. Sometimes we don't notice the bars. Take a look at Mark 16:9-20. These verses are an interpolation, added later. And now you too have entered *The Twilight Zone*. Just to make matters more interesting, chapter numbers were put in by Archbishop Stephen Langton about the year 1200 AD. The verse numbers were put in by Robert Stephanus in 1551 for the New Testament and 1553 for the Hebrew Bible.

If you would like to chat more, just give me a call, or an email. I'm sure you can tell what I find fun exploring. It doesn't change my faith; it strengthens it.

Peace to your hearts,
Rev. Deb Foster, Minister of St. Andrew's United Church, Markham
905-294-0351 minister@standrewsmarkham.com

Prayer

Holy One, from the words of our scriptures, come the voices of the ancients,
the authors, the scribes, the copiers through time.
From their words come the stories of the faithful in their time brought to our time,
from many places, till they reach our ears, our eyes, our minds,
And touch our hearts with faith, becoming the words of our holy books.
Guide us in our learning, that our faith is strengthened not diminished.
Guide us to be those who with ears really do hear, and eyes see,
What more there is to know. Amen.

Scripture this Week

Proverbs 22:1-33	A good name rather than riches.
Psalms 125	Do good, God, to those who are good.
James 2:1-17	Faith without works is dead.
Mark 7:24-37	The Syrophenician woman's faith challenges Jesus.

TR Question (Theological Reflection)

How do you understand God revealed in Jesus in Mark 7:24-37?