

Sunday September 22, 2024

First Lesson: 1 Peter 2: 2-3

Gospel Lesson: Mark 9: 30-37

Sermon Series: Read the Story: Flip the Script

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

Good morning Beloved Community.

- We are concluding our 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 and today our sermon focus is on the Gospel of Mark.
- This morning we are reading the story from the lens of what it means to **Flip the script.**
- One of the questions that our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life Class explored as it pertains to our topic was by asking the following question; "Is flipping the script a confrontational move?"
- My immediate answer would be to suggest that yes-ish... flipping the script is a confrontational move.
- **Flipping the script is about challenging the narratives, assumptions, and power dynamics that**

shape our interactions, especially in the context of social justice and the work of mercy and justice.

- So why I suggest yes-ish— to whether or not this is a confrontational move is because for those who may be satisfied with the narratives that support the status quo and power dynamics as they are, **then yes flipping the script will feel confrontational.**
- On the contrary for those who are embodying our First Lesson of Peter 2: 2-3; *crying out for nourishment now that they have had a taste of the Lord's kindness*—dare I suggest that the act of flipping the script would be a liberating move.
- This point of our conversation reminds me of the book *Who Moved my Cheese*, by Spencer Johnson.
- This book is is a powerful allegory about change, adaptability, and the human response to shifting circumstances.
- The story revolves around two mice and two tiny people navigating a maze, searching for cheese (a metaphor for what we desire in life).

- **When their cheese is moved**, they each respond differently—**some quickly adapt, while others resist and struggle with the change.**
- When viewed through the lens of flipping the script, *Who Moved My Cheese* offers valuable insights into why flipping the script can feel confrontational.
- In the book, the characters who struggle with the change initially feel anger and confusion.
- They are uncomfortable, even resentful, because the familiar narrative—their "script" of how life should work—has been upended.
- **Flipping the script, like moving the cheese**, challenges assumptions about stability, security, and control.
- It forces us to reexamine what we expect from life, from relationships, and from society, **often disrupting our comfort zone.**
- **The confrontation that arises from flipping the script** doesn't necessarily come from the act itself— but from the resistance to change.

- In the same way that Hem, one of the characters in the book, **stubbornly waits for the cheese to come back**, **people often resist** when the familiar narrative is challenged.
- Whether in personal life, social justice issues, or our everyday actions, **flipping the script pushes us into unfamiliar territory.**
- It questions deeply held beliefs and forces us to navigate uncertainty, **which can feel disorienting or even threatening.**
- **So with that said let's see whose metaphorical cheese is being moved in our gospel and how flipping the script occurs within our story.**
- **In Mark 9:30-37**, we encounter a powerful moment where Jesus **flips the script** on His disciples and challenges their understanding of greatness and power.
- This passage describes Jesus predicting His death for the second time, **followed by the disciples arguing about** who among them is the greatest.
- **Jesus responds by teaching them that true greatness comes through humility and service:**

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

- The Gospel of Mark, written around 65-70 CE, is traditionally attributed to John Mark, a companion of Peter.

John Mark (Greek: Ἰωάννης Μάρκος, romanized: *Iōannēs Markos*) is named in the Acts of the Apostles as an assistant accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys. Traditionally he is regarded as identical with Mark the Evangelist, the traditional writer of the Gospel of Mark.

- Mark is considered the earliest of the four Gospels and was written primarily for a Roman audience of early Christians.
- These Christians were living in a time of persecution, likely under Emperor Nero, and the Gospel offers encouragement for them to endure suffering as part of their discipleship.

- Mark's Gospel is characterized by urgency and presents Jesus as the suffering servant, one who calls His followers not to seek power and prestige, but to embrace servanthood and suffering.
- In this passage, **Jesus flips the script** on societal expectations of greatness, especially in the context of the Roman world where power and dominance were highly valued.
- The disciples' discussion about greatness reflects their human desire for recognition and status. **But Jesus redefines greatness**, teaching that **true honor comes through humility and serving others—particularly those whom society overlooks**, as symbolized by the child He places in their midst.
- In this passage, **Jesus flips the script** on the disciples' understanding of power and success.
- He turns their worldly notions of hierarchy upside down. This is reminiscent of the central theme in *Who Moved My Cheese*: **when what you expect is taken away, the invitation is to adjust, adapt, and embrace a new paradigm.**

- The disciples, much like the characters in the book, find their assumptions challenged.
- They struggle with the idea that true greatness doesn't come from being first in line **but by serving those who are last and vulnerable.**
- The metaphor of the child in Jesus' teaching is particularly powerful in this historical context.
- **In the ancient world, children were considered among the least important members of society.**
- By taking a child in His arms and saying that welcoming such a one is akin to welcoming Him and the One who sent Him, **Jesus flips the societal script**, asserting that God is found not in the halls of power, but in the least expected places.
- Just as *Who Moved My Cheese* illustrates how difficult change can be and how people often resist it, **Mark's passage shows the disciples wrestling with their own version of change**—how they view leadership and authority.
- **Flipping the script**, both in life and in scripture, **is often uncomfortable because it challenges the**

status quo and forces us to relinquish our attachments to control and comfort.

- In *Who Moved My Cheese*, the characters who fail to adapt (like Hem) suffer because they cling to their old narrative.
- Similarly, in Mark, the disciples' fixation on their own notions of greatness could prevent them from embracing the Kingdom values Jesus is teaching them.
- The challenge to “become last” confronts them with a choice: **will they cling to their old understanding of power, or will they embrace the servant leadership that Jesus models?**
- **Thereby making the million dollar question for me to ask to us this morning...is flipping the script necessary?**
- My answer would be to loudly proclaim YES!!!
- Church family, **can you imagine** what sections of society would suffer if we did not dare to **flip the script?**
- Consider the civil rights movement. If people had not dared to **flip the script** on segregation and

institutionalized racism, African Americans would still be living under laws that denied their basic humanity.

- The courage to confront and rewrite the narrative of racial inequality is what led to dismantling Jim Crow laws, securing voting rights, and advancing racial justice.
- Yet, even today, when we refuse to **flip the script** on systemic racism, Black communities continue to suffer from disproportionate rates of incarceration, police violence, and economic inequality.
- Similarly, **imagine if no one had ever flipped the script** on gender equality.
- Women would still be denied the right to vote, pursue careers, or make decisions about their own bodies. While significant progress has been made, women still face inequities in wages, leadership roles, and reproductive rights.
- When we neglect to challenge the structures that perpetuate sexism, women, especially those in marginalized communities, suffer most.

- Our own member Lina Bostwick on behalf of the Nebraska Nurses's Association **is flipping the script** by doing some advocacy work at the Capitol level around how we approach adolescent dysphoria, particularly the impact this has on our LGBTQ+ youth.
- These young people face higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide due to the lack of support, misunderstanding, and the stigmatization of their experience.
- Refusing to challenge the prevailing narrative on gender identity means schools, healthcare systems, and families remain unequipped to provide the compassionate and affirming care these young people desperately need.
- **By flipping the script**, we challenge rigid notions of gender, push for inclusive policies, and advocate for mental health resources, gender-affirming care, and supportive environments for young people dealing with dysphoria.
- When we fail to do this, it's the adolescents—already vulnerable and often voiceless—who are left to suffer in

silence, bearing the weight of society's resistance to change.

- Bottom line Church family, **at its core, flipping the script invites us to see people, situations, and systems in new ways that align more closely with God's vision of justice, mercy, and love.**
- In our everyday interactions, **flipping the script** could be as simple as choosing compassion when the world expects apathy or advocating for the voiceless when silence would be easier.
- It's the moment we decide to listen to the marginalized instead of centering those already in power.
- **Flipping the script to me means** exposing the hidden inequities that many choose to ignore, or refuse to accept —simply resigning to a mentality that **this is just the way things are.**
- Church family, when we confront injustice in this way, we are inviting a deeper healing for individuals and communities.
- For the biggest revelation that I leave for us all to consider **is that the script should be flipped** when the

current narrative denies dignity, equality, or the fullness of life for any person or group.

- It's not enough to notice these injustices from a distance; when you and I are faced with systems or stories that keep people marginalized or oppressed, we have a responsibility to act—to step in and rewrite those narratives.
- **Who moved my Cheese?**
- This I may not know...but I am so glad that they did!
- Because **in that movement, in that disruption**, we find the opportunity for growth, for justice, and for the full transformation and all of its infinite possibilities that God calls us to!
- Thanks be to God!