

THURSDAY 28 July 2022 "John Mark" (Acts 12:25-13:1)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Did you ever have the chance, as a teenager or young adult, of being invited by an adult you respected to travel on an adventure with them? If so, did you accept the invitation and how did that trip affect your life? Today, let's join an adventure exactly like that and see what happened, and what we can learn.

Do you remember yesterday we watched the apostle Peter standing in a dark street at night, knocking on the door of a house, anxiously hoping an answer would come soon? Peter was frightened! He'd just been freed from King Herod's prison by an angel and had come to the house of a woman he knew named Mary, because often the Christians gathered in her home for prayer. *Sure enough, those who answered the door invited Peter in to join the prayer meeting which had been praying for his release*, but Peter was on the run and needed to find a place to hide from Herod's prison guards who certainly would be hunting for him!

Dr. Luke, the author of Acts, gives us this very brief but very important description about the special house where Peter went to find the prayer meeting: **"Peter went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying."** (Acts 12:12) Now let's be honest my friends, do you sometimes get a little confused with so many people in the Bible having the same name, like **'Mary'**? Who are the different **"Marys"** in the story of Jesus? Well let's take a look, do you remember these...

a) **First**, of course is *Mary the young virgin girl to whom the angel Gabriel appeared, and she became the earthly mother of Jesus.* (Luke 1:26,27)

b) The **second** most famous **Mary** is probably *Mary from the town of Magdala, which is why she was called Mary Magdalene.* She became a very close follower of Jesus, and you probably remember John records that she was among the first to see the empty tomb on resurrection Sunday and the woman who was crying near the tomb and mistook the risen Jesus for the gardener, until Jesus spoke her name. (John 20) Did you know Dr. Luke tells us **Mary Magdalene** experienced a powerful deliverance from Jesus (Luke 8:2) for He had driven 7 evil spirits out of her and then she became one of the women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples and helped to care for them. I assume that means she often cooked meals or perhaps washed Jesus' clothes.

c) Perhaps the **third** most famous **"Mary"** in the Gospel accounts is *Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha.* This is the Mary who sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him teach while her sister Martha worked feverishly to prepare meals. Perhaps you remember that frustrated Martha and she and Jesus had a chat about that!

You may also recall this Mary poured a pint of very expensive pure nard on Jesus' feet while He and His disciples were having a meal the night before His 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. (John 12:1-3)

d) A **fourth** Mary is "*Mary the wife of Clopas*" who was standing at the cross of Jesus when He was being crucified. (John 19:25)

e) And now here in Acts 12 we meet a **fifth Mary** who is identified only as '*Mary the mother of John also called Mark.*' It seems Mary and her family lived in Jerusalem and were among those who had become passionate followers of Jesus, so much so that her home was evidently one of many homes in Jerusalem opened for what many might call a 'house church'. A place where Jesus followers met to pray and probably under the teaching of one of the apostles, learn more and more about Jesus.

But just as **Mary** is a fairly common name in the New Testament, so we often find men named **John**, right? Do you remember the different "**Johns**" in the story of Jesus?

a) **First**, of course, is *John the miraculous son of Zechariah and Elizabeth*. This John was announced also by Gabriel and his role was the forerunner, the announcer of Jesus. He is most famous as "**John the Baptist**" and we find his story especially in Luke 1 & 2.

b) The **second John** who is probably more famous than John the Baptist, is *John the disciple and best friend of Jesus*. This John and his brother James were in the fishing business with their father Zebedee and were friends with the two brothers Peter and Andrew. *This John is the author of five books of the New Testament...* The Gospel of John; the little letters 1st, 2nd & 3rd John, and the last book of the Bible, the "Revelation." This John is believed to have been the last of the original disciples to finally die at the old age of about 95.

c) The **third John** is the one we meet here in Acts 12, but he's really known by his name **John Mark** or simply **Mark**. As we'll see, this John traveled with Saul & Barnabas on their first missionary journey, and later traveled with Barnabas and even then, later with Peter.

Finally, *this John Mark is perhaps most famous for being author of the second book of the New Testament which bears his name, MARK and tells the story of Jesus.*

Now let's rejoin the story Dr Luke is telling us of what happened in the years following the return of Jesus to heaven. Acts 13 begins: "***When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem taking with them John also called Mark. Now in the church in Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.***"

We remember Barnabas and Saul had come to Jerusalem bearing a financial gift received from the Jesus followers of Antioch, Syria, about 400 miles to the north. The Antioch money was given by these Gentile Christians to help the Jewish Jesus followers in Jerusalem because Jerusalem was starving as a result of a famine spreading across the Roman Empire. We don't know how long Barnabas and Saul had stayed in Jerusalem, but we presume since the last verse of Acts 11 tells us of their **coming**, and the last verse of Acts 12 tells us of their **return to Antioch**, the remarkable events of Acts 12, which we looked at yesterday, happened while Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem. *If true, you'll remember we saw Peter was imprisoned during Passover and we can imagine how significant that was for Saul as he remembered back about 14 years to the days when he was a young, zealous Pharisee calling for the crucifixion of Jesus at Passover time!*

We don't know exactly why John Mark went with Barnabas and Saul on their long trip back to Antioch, but that decision was very significant in his life and in the story of the spread of the Gospel. As they walked those 400 miles, can't you imagine the orientation Barnabas and Saul gave John Mark about what he would see in the big, multicultural city of Antioch. Somewhere along the road, one of them probably said, *'Oh, and John Mark, you'll hear a new word in Antioch as people describe the Jesus movement there. The word is **"Christians"** and it's a word the people of Antioch have started using to describe us who are openly followers of Jesus. It applies to both Jewish and Gentile Jesus followers. We accept it as a compliment, for they seem to be saying we represent Jesus to Antioch! So please, John Mark, keep that in mind as you come with us... your behavior, your words, your attitudes not only reflect on us who are bringing you to Antioch for the first time, but also you will be seen as a "Christian" who represents Jesus!*

I very much appreciate Dr Luke's explanation of the leaders, teachers and prophets in the Jesus movement in Antioch and *I imagine it was quite eye opening to young John Mark to see such diversity in the spiritual leadership team*. Barnabas was a Levite from the island of Cyprus and friend of the apostles, remember? (Acts 4:36) Simeon called Niger we know nothing about other than his name. Lucius of Cyrene would have likely been a black man since Cyrene was a city in the region of north Africa today known as the country of Libya. Thus, it's possible both Simeon and Lucius were African followers of Jesus.

Manaen was distinctive not by the color of his skin but by his boyhood friendship with King Herod Antipas, here called 'Herod the Tetrarch', remember he was one of the royal Herod family. And then of course there was Saul, the Jewish Pharisee who had persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and had encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and been dramatically transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. *WOW, now that my friends is DIVERSITY in leadership!* I can only imagine what a dynamic group of Jesus followers it was in Antioch and how that Jesus movement was growing and impacting the city of Antioch with these five leading this spiritual movement.

Now into this spiritual tsunami comes young John Mark with a hunger to see what God is doing in Syria! What he didn't know, of course, was what God was preparing him for... the adventure of a lifetime which we will see tomorrow!

For today, WHO have been those adults who have invited you into adventures which have profoundly affected who you are today and how did God use their influence in your life to shape you? And who are those young people you are influencing and inviting on the adventure of becoming a disciple of Jesus? I urge you to enter their names into your journal and thank God for them!

Today's Scripture is Acts 12:25-13:1.