

Week One: Reimagining the Church

Participant Sheet

Session 1: Week of September 22, 2024

Disciples of the Cross

Mark 8:31-38

Brewster Baptist Church, Brewster MA

Connecting

***If your group is gathering for the first time:**

1. Introduce yourself, and share: your name (see attached sheet to write down everyone's name to help you remember), what town you live in, how you heard about BBC and which worship service you attend.
2. Do you have a cross of any kind in your home? It could be on a wall, on a necklace, or in many other forms. In as few words as possible, describe it and why it's meaningful to you.
3. As you participate in the *Reimagining the Church* series, what's one thing you're looking forward to?

***If you're in an ongoing group:**

1. Do you have a cross of any kind in your home? It could be on a wall, on a necklace, or in many other forms. In as few words as possible, describe it and why it's meaningful to you.
2. As you participate in the *Reimagining the Church* series, what's one thing you're looking forward to?

As a group, take turns reading out loud the **Healthy Habits for a Small Group**. Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's a good idea to regularly be reminded of the habits and expectations that help groups thrive.

Healthy Habits for a Small Group

Come with 100% of yourself. Each of us brings all of who we are to the group – our joys and successes, as well as our fears and failures.

Presume welcome and extend welcome. We all learn most effectively in spaces that welcome us. Know that you are welcome, that you belong, and extend this welcome to others.

No fixing. Offer advice or reflection to another person *only* when invited to do so, but otherwise avoid the temptation to fix, set-straight or counsel another member of the group.

Share the air. Pay attention to how much of the group time you take. Every voice is important, and no single voice ought to dominate.

Speak for Self. A helpful practice is to use “I” statements. This is a time to reflect on your own faith journey and not on someone else or “the world.”

Pay attention to people, not to your electronic devices.

Listen to Silence. Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. Allow silence to be another member of the group.

Observe Confidentiality. This is especially important for trust to develop. What's said in the group stays in the group.

Believe that it's possible to emerge from this experience refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when you came. Expect that our time together can provide for renewal, refreshment, and helpful perspectives for our spiritual journeys.

Mark: Disciples of the Cross

Introduction: Throughout the New Testament, being a disciple of Jesus is to be part of an alternative community that was in some tension with the prevailing culture. Each week as part of our series on **Reimagining the Church**, we'll examine and discuss a different image or metaphor for the church using different books in the New Testament. In his book, *In Search of the Church: New Testament Images for Tomorrow's Congregations* which is a source for this series, Keith A. Russell notes, *"Depending on where we look, we see different things. The New Testament is filled with portraits of various communities in formation. Where the community is forming, when it is forming, and what the world around it is like makes a great difference in the kind of community we find, the image of the church we discover there."* What the images of the church have in common is the idea of being an alternative community with different values, priorities, ways of behaving, relating, and speaking than the dominant culture in which the church exists. This is still true today. To quote Russell again, *"Perhaps what the church has to offer in this troubled time is precisely a form of life where alternatives to hate and violence, greed and destruction can be envisioned, where life can be celebrated for what it might be rather than denounced for what it is not. I believe that many of us in congregations today hunger for such a community and are searching for more. Let us continue together this search for the church, believing that if we see beyond what is, we can become what we yearn to be."*

Background: Mark was the first of the gospels to be written, likely in Northern Palestine, around the year 66. At that time, the households of faith Mark was concerned about still understood themselves as a sect within Judaism, and they were caught in the middle of a severe social and political crisis. In the year 66, Palestine was under Roman occupation. Different groups within Palestinian society were responding in different ways to the reality of military occupation. **First**, there was **the Jewish elite**, consisting of the **high priestly families and the Sadducees**, who sought to keep the peace by cooperating with Roman

authorities. This group believed it was better to compromise than to lose what autonomy they had left. **Second**, were **the Pharisees** who opposed this collaboration and called for reform within Judaism. They wanted to reform and purify religious leadership and practice rather than overthrow or destroy it. **A third group, the Essenes**, called for withdrawal from all current practices and alliances and the development of separate communities. **A fourth group, the Zealots**, called for a direct break with Rome, an end to collaboration, and armed insurrection. Eventually their political and military resistance provoked a major and bloody response by Rome, culminating in the destruction of the Temple in the year 70.

Mark is trying to lay out a path for his households to follow amid this tension and upheaval. He doesn't advocate for collaboration, reform, withdrawal or overthrow, instead Mark urges his households to refuse to take sides and instead to practice radical discipleship based on the cross, the symbol of Jesus' victory over the powers of death and domination. Mark calls Christians to be an alternative community with the cross of Jesus as their symbol of resistance.

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed

of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Questions: Remember, no one in the group is “*the answer person*,” the questions are for the group to wrestle with and discuss together.

1. What does it mean to set “your mind not on divine things but on human things” (v.33)? How do we do this daily in tangible ways?
2. How do you think the disciples felt hearing Jesus say, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*” How good are you at renouncing self-centeredness and exercising self-denial? Are there any practices or habits that help you deny yourself that you can share?
3. What does it mean and how does it look for us to “lose our life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel?” What does that require of us? Is there anything which you’re not willing to let go of for the sake of following Christ? Is there anything you are holding onto that you shouldn’t?
4. Mark’s presentation of Jesus continually confronts the believer with the need to choose Jesus the Messiah and his way of the cross. In Mark, suffering is the means to disempower evil and the cross is a symbol of power and victory over the forces of

domination and death. How does this impact how we view suffering and share that Jesus is the Messiah of God as we go about our lives?

5. How do we stand fast as an alternative shaped by the way of the cross and not choose the way of the Romans (domination and power) or one of the Jewish responses (collaboration, reform, withdrawal or overthrow)?
6. How does worshiping and learning together help us live as disciples of the cross? What do we need to know and do to function as Christians in our time?

Praying for Each Other

Are there any joys to celebrate, any burdens we can share?

As an option for a closing prayer, here are three verses of the hymn “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” by Isaac Watts,

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word. Amen

Reimagining the Church: My Small Group

In case we need to contact each other regarding a change or transportation etc.

My Small Group Host

Address

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

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