
Breaking Open the Jar: How the Unnamed Woman in Mark Points the Way to the Messiah

The Revs. Jason Chesnut and Tim Brown (joined by Prof. Richard Swanson)

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Pastor Tim Brown: This [Mark 14:3-9] is a hard text to preach on for a lot of pastors because they either take the out that Jesus has a wink and a nod, which I don't think is in the text anywhere, or they skip this altogether and focus on something else in the verse because they have a hard time mentioning it. So that's where I will kind of needle in. Like, how do we approach a complex text? As a director of stewardship, I find that a lot of times people bring up the Jesus and the coin text—give to Caesar what is Caesar's—and they say, "Well, what did Jesus mean?" I'll say, "Well, he didn't really give an answer, which means you have to wrestle with it." And that makes everyone uncomfortable, which I think is exactly the point. Otherwise, Jesus would have given an answer.

Pastor Jason Chesnut: Jesus does that a lot, not give an answer.

TB: Right.

JC: Give an answer, it's not an answer.

TB: Right.

JC: Reply to a question with a question.

TB: Right.

JC: This is a win-win for us and it can't just be me and Tim. As great as that is, we need a third, and so I'm glad you're here for that reason, Richard. I'm really sad Tuhena's¹ not, I'm going to name that now, not just because that ends up with three white guys on the call—not that three white guys don't have something to say—we need to say that. So, I'm just sad that she's going to miss this. She talks a lot about how humans being together is inherently "terri-citing," is one of her words, and it's overwhelming and it's beautiful. All the things.

TB: All the things.

JC: I love this story because Pastor Lori Ruge-Jones, the Reverend Doctor Lori Ruge-Jones, excuse me, changed the way I think about the words of institution because she says, instead of "On the night in which he was betrayed," she says, "Having been anointed by someone he loved very much and about to be betrayed by someone he loved very much, our Lord Jesus took bread..." And then the rest is exactly the same.

1. Tuhina Verma Rasche is the third ELCA pastor associated with the Anam Cara Community, a digital-first mission start of the ELCA.

How do we approach a complex text? As a director of stewardship, I find that a lot of times people bring up the Jesus and the coin text—give to Caesar what is Caesar's—and they say, "Well, what did Jesus mean?" I'll say, "Well, he didn't really give an answer, which means you have to wrestle with it." And that makes everyone uncomfortable, which I think is exactly the point. Otherwise, Jesus would have given an answer.

And I say that now, that's just the way that I say it. And it helps me, I think, do what Jesus tells us to do in this story, which is every time we remember him, remember her. The way you say it, Richard, this unknown woman comes out of nowhere to anoint the anointed one. That's what Mary and Salome are doing at the end—is going to anoint his dead body, right?

This is so crucial and she's an unnamed woman coming out of nowhere. To your point, often mislabeled as a sex worker, a lot of mislabeling, a lot of assumptions, which is what I like about you, how you provoke the text, Richard. It helps us at least think outside those assumptions. This is the first time I'm thinking maybe she had a lot of jars of nard at home and she was very well off. Does that make this any less powerful?

Prof. Richard Swanson: It's the right question because she has her own integrity and she walks into the story and all of a sudden, she commands everyone's view and then she disappears and she never gets a name. Now there's an offense there, but there's also an oddity because she keeps her name to herself and that gives her

a particular kind of power. She shows us only what she chooses to and she does exactly what she came to do and then she's gone. And on the one hand, yes, of course patriarchs tell these stories and patriarchs erase women all the time.

JC: All the time.

RS: On the other hand, she has control and Mark's story is odd because at the very end we discover that the whole story could not have happened without the women that we missed seeing all the way through. In the final scene after the death, we suddenly find out that while all the men have run away and are hiding under their beds, there's a very large number of women who have always been there and they deaconed for him, which means they connected need with resource all the way through the story and we never saw them do it.

Now, that requires every male interpreter to say, "How do you suppose it is that we missed the women all the time?" It means that in this story, the women are always active and we always miss them. I say that's an object lesson and I say it means when she steps into the story, she has control of how much she reveals and she doesn't tell us her name because it's none of our business.

TB: I love that part right there, the "it's none of your business" piece because a lot of times we look for the backstory, right? We want to know that, and this is just a beautiful scene. I mean, what does it mean to have a moment of beauty and have it mean something without anything else? That to me could be something you could hang a sermon off of, this moment of beauty. Another striking piece of this text is the fact that she didn't open the jar, she broke it.

JC: Yeah, right?

TB: Which means she's not going back, right? We're not reserving anything. We're not keeping anything back. It's all going to this place. I think that's a testament to Discipleship 101 right there. It's this idea that, no, there's no going back. We're breaking the jar. We're not reserving any.

JC: Yeah, that's stunning. It's stunning and you name it correctly, Richard. She could have just unstopped it. It's a little dramatic. It's a little extra and I love it.

RS: And she doesn't tell us why she did that.

TB: Right.

JC: It's extravagant and it's wasteful.

TB: Well, and I love—So I don't know, Richard, if this is true for you too, but Mark is my favorite gospel. Mark is my favorite gospel because he's on the move and Jesus is the most human and there's so many question marks instead of periods, right? And Mark doesn't do the out that John does when John writes up this tale. John writes up this tale to where this woman is anointing the Messiah before his death in the same way that you anoint the lamb before the Passover. You identify the lamb before. But Mark doesn't

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do that because that's not the point in Mark. The point is Messiah only, right? Or if that's a point and we're meant to question that. Yeah. I just love that Mark doesn't give us an out.

JC: Yeah. And that none of the disciples thought to do this.

TB: Right.

JC: I mean, to your point, Richard, like this woman comes out of nowhere. Like the young man with the clothes around his mid-section who gets it torn off and runs off into the darkness naked.

TB: The *neaniskos*?

JC: He's got a name?

TB: That's the Greek. Yeah. The *neaniskos*. Yeah. He's the young guy or the new dude. Yeah.

JC: *neaniskos*. I love it. I never heard that. That's great.

RS: Yeah.

JC: And so, it's so mysterious. The Bible's weird enough already, and especially Mark. It's so mysterious and enigmatic and what does any of this mean? And for this story, specifically this story brackets his passion narrative. It's two stories of anointing by women.

TB: Well, another piece that strikes me is of course the disciples playing righteous hypocrite for a second with, well, "this could have been sold to give money to the poor," which I hear congregation councils and boards and leaders always say in a moment of extravagance.

JC: Which I always want to hear with, "it could have been sold, but was it? Would you have done that with it?"

TB: Exactly.

JC: Because I don't know that you would have.

TB: Yeah, that's Monday morning quarterbacking, right? And also, I think ingenuine because in the moment of beauty, what does it mean to also have beauty for beauty's sake? The church used to be really involved in beauty and I mean, that's what stained-glass windows were for. Stained-glass windows were to show you a transcendence that you couldn't otherwise see in the world.

JC: Mother Teresa said as much when she walked into churches that made her feel that way.

TB: Absolutely. Absolutely. So, what does it mean to also indulge in beauty in this world in a way that defies logic and yet makes so much sense?

RS: What makes this beautiful? I love that. I've never thought of it in terms of a moment of beauty and I find that compelling. When you say it's beautiful, what do you mean?

TB: To me, there are a couple of things there. The act itself is so intimate that it's beautiful. It's like when you're sitting down on the couch and your toddler crawls up on your lap without any prompting and you can't put into words exactly what that means, but it means something extraordinarily wonderful and it's there for a brief second, and soon they're 13 and will never do it again, but you wouldn't give that up for another moment, right? That's the evocative thing that it means to me, right?

RS: Yeah. The volatility of the moment.

TB: Yeah.

JC: I mean, I think about Neruda talks about how beauty gives us a glimpse of death because something that evokes that kind of emotion can show us how brief and ultimately insubstantial our lives are when it comes down to it, like how our lives are brief and they're going to end and here they're going to end very, very soon. This beauty is showing us Jesus' death, but like all beauty, I agree with Neruda, all beauty though shows us a piece of death in it.

TB: Yeah. Well, and of course, I mean, this echoes the hauling the spices to the tomb, right? This is just a wonderful echo of that. She knows what it's about, but the disciples have no clue. How does she, this nameless unknown, know what's going on here and nobody else knows? And yet we wonder why the street preacher, who's screaming at the wind because we think they're so high on drugs, somehow has some insight that we don't have.

JC: Right.

TB: I don't mean the one that's yelling at you because of who you are. I mean the one who is saying truths and you're like, "I wonder how they stumbled upon that reality."

JC: Right. It's that image of, I mean from Jesus and "Jesus of Montreal" when it's a dude playing Jesus in a passion narrative who gets so caught up in it, he starts to quote Mark's apocalyptic verses verbatim in the subway system in Montreal and people are like, "Dude, this guy is insane." And yet, right?

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TB: Yeah. If only he'd do it in French, he'd hit more people there, but yeah.

JC: It's "Last Temptation of Christ" and then "Jesus of Montreal." That's the ranking of Jesus movies there. It's close, but...

TB: Absolutely.

JC: Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome also know what to do.

TB: Yeah.

JC: They're going to anoint the dead body and when they get there and he's not there, best resurrection story again, the reason why Mark is not just our favorite, it's objectively the best gospel.

TB: Objectively. Go back to Galilee.

JC: But there's no resurrection in a resurrection story and then the young man dressed in white, is that the young man? Is that the young boy?

TB: Also *neaniskos*. Also *neaniskos*, the new guy. Same story.

JC: Right. So, then he says, he's not here, he's not here, but he doesn't say, "Now go and get a male disciple to tell this news." He says, excuse me, he says, "No, the men aren't here, shocker. They deserted at the beginning of this passion narrative, but you're here so go and tell." Right?

RS: And then the storyteller says, "So they didn't."

TB: Yeah. And yet here we are reading it.

JC: And then the storytellers have said that—

TB: And yet here we are reading it.

JC: Right.

RS: It doesn't say, "But they didn't." It says, "So they didn't." And that's strange storytelling.

TB: And the dude at the tomb says, "Go back to Galilee." That's where you'll find the disciples, right? Well, where does Mark start,

but in Galilee, which means go read the story again and maybe you'll get it this time. I mean, that's what I take out of it. Go read the story again, maybe you'll get it this time. And then you just have this unending loop.

JC: The last word in Greek is "because," isn't it? The gospel ends with... "They ran away, they were afraid because..." right?

RS: It ends in a sentence fragment and that's the way I render it into English because "for they were afraid" in English sounds like a complete sentence. In Greek, it is offensively broken. And so, I translate it as "they were afraid because..."

JC: All right. Beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Christ, the son of God, right?

TB: In Galilee. Yeah. And Richard, you just hung yourself a little hook there that folks can name their sermon off of. "Offensively Broken" is a wonderful sermon title for when this shows up, not only the jar but the whole scene and the people reading it and us hearing it and I mean altogether, right? That's a wonderful little phrase.

JC: And the early Christians who so couldn't stand it, they came up with new endings.

TB: Offensively broken, which is kind of a tale for the whole gospel and for the people that receive it. I love renaming Mark a feminist in history because everyone says Luke is the feminist and Luke can be a feminist too, right? That's great. But I think we are hitting on something. I think Mark's a feminist because throughout Mark, it is the women only who get it.

JC: That's right.

TB: When Peter says Jesus is still the Messiah, he still doesn't get it, right? And this woman who remains nameless is the disciple.

RS: That's a nice link because Peter uses the word, but he understands it only the way John the baptizer understood it, as someone stronger than me. The woman makes him anointed, which is to say makes him the Messiah, the *Mashiach*, and she does it... Jesus... I hate the way this is so often interpreted because we interpret it and wait for Jesus to explain things that of course she couldn't have known this. I think the woman knew exactly what she was doing and Jesus said, "I get it. You anointed me for burial." It's not him saying, "Now I will interpret this extravagant act." No, it's him saying, "She anointed me for burial." I had no idea. I'd never thought of it that way before, but what you just said made me think that.

TB: Yeah.

RS: She revealed to him what being Messiah was about.

TB: Yeah. And isn't that the way sometimes, right? I mean, I love this idea that Jesus doesn't have it all figured out because that gives me so much permission.

RS: Yeah. I need that permission all the time.

TB: I think Mark's a feminist because throughout Mark, it is the women only who get it.

RS: I think the woman knew exactly what she was doing and Jesus said, "I get it. You anointed me for burial." It's not him saying, "Now I will interpret this extravagant act." No, it's him saying, "She anointed me for burial." I had no idea. I'd never thought of it that way before, but what you just said made me think that. She revealed to him what being Messiah was about.

JC: I mean, Jesus allows himself to be taught by the Syrophenician woman—to be corrected.

RS: Even if he doesn't allow himself, she schooled him.

TB: Right. Even if he was resistant.

RS: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that's right. Allowed himself. Yeah.

RS: The storyteller allows him to be taught by the woman who—

JC: The storyteller allows him to be taught. Yeah, Mark.

TB: But I think that's really important to Mark, though. Otherwise, he wouldn't be in there because what a stupid thing to add. I mean, John really writes the gospel that people want for a Messiah, except Jesus is a little long-winded at the end, which I think no one wants a long-winded Messiah. But I think at its core though, Mark writes the story of the Messiah that nobody wants, but you get, sorry, and it makes no sense that he would do that unless that was really important to get real. You know?

JC: And to tell that entire story that begins, to your point, with this is the good news, of Roman occupation? No. Of the Christ, not the empire, not the emperor, not the Caesar, but the Christ, the actual son of God who at the end of all of this, nobody says anything at all because they're overcome with fear.

TB: All the *stelas* that you have been reading on the roadside have been lying to you. This is the good news, right? And unfortunately, only this nameless woman gets it at first.

RS: And presumably all the women around her, but she steps in

and knows exactly what's going on and creates this movement within the story.

JC: Yeah. And if we just take Mark's gospel, which generations of Jesus followers only had this story of Jesus, that we see how a grassroots movement can move from the empty tomb to Galilee started by the women that's saying one thing, which is Jesus has risen. Have you seen him? Yes, the risen Lord is resurrecting in us. As we gather together and as we break this bread and drink this cup, all those things, we are resurrecting Jesus. And you had said in your notes, Richard, that we have two or three centuries of trying to struggle with this in the early church. How do we talk about the resurrection of Jesus when he so clearly died and was put to death, was publicly executed? What do we do in the aftermath? Mark gives us that way.

RS: I think Mark is a profound reflection on exactly that because there is no representation in early Christian art of the Messiah on the cross until about the year 300 and that means—

TB: That's telling.

JC: It's very telling.

RS: It means that they had no—We make art for lots of reasons, but that kind of art that sits there in a worship space is static and nailed down and the whole business of a murdered Messiah was clearly not nailed down at least until then. I would argue we don't know what it means yet.

JC: Oh yeah. Well, amen. But weren't some of the earliest images from the catacombs, the feeding of the 5,000 and like Jonah and the whale? Jonah and the whale, Jonah and the fish.

TB: But you're talking about stories of salvation, not sacrifice. And when Constantine came around and power joined hands with the church, that's when we start getting stories of sacrifice, not salvation, because that becomes how you control and work. I mean, what we have here for this woman breaking this alabaster jar on the feet of Jesus is a story of salvation. Nobody knows it but her though, because she's anointing his almost dead body. She's preserving it. She's saving it. And it may look like a moment of sacrifice because of the broken jar and everything like that, but it's actually a moment of preservation, which if we think of the whole Christian story is exactly the arc that Mark is going for.

RS: That's nice. That's nice. She is saving him.

TB: Yeah. And Richard, and I love that she's saving him and also, she's saving him from having to wonder what he's supposed to be about too.

RS: Yeah.

TB: Even if Jesus doesn't get it quite yet, but he will.

JC: Take this cup from me, man.

TB: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

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TB: What we have here for this woman breaking this alabaster jar on the feet of Jesus is a story of salvation. ... She's anointing his almost dead body. She's preserving it. She's saving it. And it may look like a moment of sacrifice because of the broken jar, but it's actually a moment of preservation, which if we think of the whole Christian story is exactly the arc that Mark is going for.

TB: I think Mark is like A New Hope, right? It's the best one. It's the original. It's so incomplete in all the best ways. And the more they did it, the worse it got. It's like the prequel is like 1 through 3, or John is the prequel, right? It's like they tried to explain too much. But I do like this idea that the women are the ones who get it and somehow we still don't get it, looking at you, Southern Baptist Convention.

JC: And looking at you, ELCA too, right? In a different way.

TB: Sure. I mean, let's not hit our high horse too high.

JC: Right.

RS: Every woman I know who is a pastor in any tradition tells stories of how no one listens and the communities wait for a man to say what the woman just said and then they believe it. I can't imagine living with that.

TB: And neither can Mark.

RS: Yeah.

JC: And neither can Mark.

RS: A piece I'd like to draw your attention to is something that struck me this time that I hadn't thought about before. This is in the house of Simon the Leper. We've all talked about that. Not Simon who used to be a leper, it's Simon the Leper and leprosy, not Hansen's disease, but leprosy in these texts is understood to be—Well, in Jacob Neusner's term, it's a source of uncleanness, a metaphorical fluid that can flow from one place to another. And the uncleanness of Simon the Leper is as contagious as corpse uncleanness. Now, if the woman anoints Jesus for burial, she has metaphorical uncleanness because she's touched his corpse. Same as the women who come to the tomb expecting to touch his corpse. It is their job to become—"unclean" is the wrong word, even though that's what the Hebrew means and the Greek too, but it refers to coming in physical contact with something that is so extraordinary, therefore holy, that it shakes reality, and a dead body does that the first time you see someone die, the hair on the back of my neck stood up.

Well, the women are coming to do that knowing that the hair will stand up on the backs of their necks, but it is their task and the woman without a name but with a mission, steps into the scene and touches him as if he were dead, therefore taking his uncleanness into her, which is just a weird, twisted element of this scene that I'd love to hear you think about.

JC: Well, what hits me is that the disciples' response to her makes more sense when we think about their insistence on not understanding that Jesus is going to die. And in fact, that's what Messiah does, is die. And so, they don't ever want to hear that. They don't get it. As you say, Peter rebukes Jesus, right? Says, "If you had any honor, you would not talk this way or do this." And so when I think about it, it just adds a different layer and a powerful layer to me. The thing about the disciples saying, "This oil, this alabaster perfume could have been sold and the money used for the poor," is their way of saying, again, don't tell me Jesus is going to die. That's not what this is about.

TB: Yeah. We'll go to great lengths to reject things we don't want to hear or don't want to know. What comes to my mind when you mention that, Richard, is how in all of these tales and all these situations, and I think in our lives, proximity is primary, and how proximity changes everything that happens there. And even the thought that they were in the house of Simon the Leper, well, scandal number one, and then this woman comes in and puts scandal on scandal, and if anybody should have been anointed, it should have been Simon because he was already going to be a dead man and proximity changes everything. And in like fashion, the person that's supposed to be dead is alive and Jesus is the one who's dead. Right?

JC: And Mark starts off the chapter two days before the Passover. Again, just prepping us. We get to see that we're on the precipice of something extraordinary, which is the same reason why Hitchcock said, "I could film two people talking at a dinner table and the con-

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versation would go one way. But if I tell the audience beforehand that there's a bomb under that table, conversation feels different even though it hasn't changed at all." And a lot of times we don't allow ourselves to enter into these stories with that recognition of how heavy this moment is and how even the people closest to Jesus did not understand what the... happening.

RS: What does it mean that in two days it would be Passover?

TB: And I don't know that Mark would identify Jesus as the Passover lamb, but he's certainly inviting us to question the idea. I mean, that's the thing. He wouldn't say that or he would have said it, right? But he's inviting us to question the idea, make our own conclusion. I mean, I wonder if more than anything Mark is saying, "Hey, remember when the Angel of Death came over the houses?" We're about to remember that in this house of death. This is a scene that's going to happen again.

RS: Ancient sources say that during Passover, because it's a pilgrimage festival, people travel to Jerusalem. Ancient sources say that it was the time of greatest unrest and the Romans were terrified because a feast of liberation meant that people filled Jerusalem and were in fact thinking about being free, not from Pharaoh but from Rome. And so "in two days it would be Passover" means there is boiling under the surface that says freedom is ready to erupt and unrest is ready to erupt and it matters that this story is told in this form after the crushing of the Jewish revolt.

JC: Right.

TB: Yeah. When imagination and hope hold hands, dangerous things happen.

RS: Yeah. Even deadly things. That's one of the things that's hardest for me because this story is so loaded with hopeful anti-empire

language, but at the moment it was clear to every imaginable audience that empire wins and there were something like a million dead Jews to show for the hopes of freedom. That means that every family had empty places at their table.

This is a side trip and I don't think it has any part in the article, and it's not provable, but my hypothesis is that the leaving of an empty seat for Elijah originates post-70 and it originates when some kid at Passover says, "Why do we have an empty seat for Uncle Louie who's dead?" And the grandma said, "That's actually the seat that Elijah will come and sit in when everything is restored."

And so, it's a turning of the house of death after. Every imaginable audience for the Gospel of Mark is filled with people who have empty seats at their supper table and at their Passover table. And so, it's a boiling freedom, but it is also a memory of how many hundreds of thousands of people are dead because of the hope of freedom. Which has everything to do with a murdered Messiah for me.

JC: Yeah. All that the Romans left was this crumbling western wall, right? Like that's it.

TB: Broken jars.

RS: Nice. Nice. I'd never thought of that.

JC: Yeah. I mean, there's a reason. Yeah, it boils over. You can understand that the temperature of Jerusalem, occupied Jerusalem, would start to boil if you take the story seriously, that God saves God's people, God liberates the oppressed. Why was Exodus cut out of any Bible that an enslaved person could get their hands on in the United States for the same reason?

TB: Yeah.

JC: And Passover itself having that understanding of liberation at its core. I mean, that story was already there.

TB: Well, and I wonder maybe in this scene, right? All right. So maybe this woman with her broken jar and his oily feet has set Jesus free to be the Messiah.

RS: And it's his head, not his feet in this scene.

TB: That's what I meant. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry. No, John does the feet, right? John does the feet. Yeah. Yeah, no. Anoints his head to be the Messiah.

RS: Yeah.

TB: She frees him.

JC: Like the Syrophoenician woman, freedom to think beyond the tribes of Israel, right?

TB: Yeah.

RS: And yeah, beyond the boundaries of Israel, but to think beyond his own assumptions. The first one is an abstraction. I'm going to learn to think beyond the bounds of Israel, but it all

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comes home to roost when you have to think beyond your own limits and my own prejudices.

TB: Well, and I wonder too, I mean, the way that that's been made true in my life is when I've fallen in love. When I've fallen in love with people I didn't think were lovable or I didn't think I should love, that's the moment that your mind expands. And I know this woman fell in love with Jesus, Jesus fell in love with her, the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus fell in love with her. I mean, it's a story of continually falling in love and then you figure out what you're about.

RS: And none of that is about strength or stronger than I or the kinds of things that are stereotypically patriarchal.

TB: Yeah. I keep looking for toxic masculinity in the gospels out of Jesus and I can't find it. I mean, I find moments where he messes up, especially in Mark, because that's Mark's portrait, but I keep looking for this Jesus that these other people are saying and I don't see it. I don't find it. I don't know where they're getting it from unless they keep looking at the mirror and calling it Jesus.

RS: Yes. Which we do all the time.

TB: Of course. And I do it too in my worst moments.

RS: I'm still wondering about the flavor of Passover in this scene given that the scene is performed post the destruction of Jerusalem. And the thing that's occurring to me and the thing I've got to ask about is I've been listening to what friends of mine, people of color have said about Juneteenth and it really feels different when I listen to them. And it's something I'm trying to think about but don't know how to think about yet, but they notice first of all that the people who've discovered the Emancipation Proclamation were people that had been kept from discovering it. And so that it's this weird bitter freedom. And the fact of Juneteenth didn't mean that voting rights were allowed, didn't mean that it was safe to walk while black. And there's this weird bitter joy that I hear in what I've heard them say, but I don't understand it. I'm just some old guy.

JC: Well, yeah. I mean, you're some white guy, right? We can't fathom it as white people.

TB: One of the things that I like that you did there, Richard, and I think that preachers don't do this enough is they try to explain the scene in the time it happened instead of trying to explain the scene in the time it's heard, or not explained, but think about it, the scene in the time it's heard because I do think that changes everything because we're imagining that this is like watching a news report in live time and that's not what's happening. This has been read now. And so that changes everything, I think, especially interpretation-wise.

JC: Yeah. I mean, I've always loved that about you, Richard, and you've helped me see a lot of things differently when you said it, when we set these texts in the time in which they were heard, and then we can start thinking about why were they told then and what were they seeing outside themselves? What were they seeing around when they were hearing these stories?

TB: And I think that also lends credence to the deep truth that none of us want to stare in the face at, which means that just because something meant something doesn't mean it means something. I mean, that to me is revolutionary when hearing it because then we get to ask the question, okay, what does this mean for us right now? Not what it meant, what it means. What did it mean to have the women be the only people who figure it out in the Gospel of Mark? What does it mean to have extravagant beauty in a moment of crisis or foreboding? What does it mean? What does it mean to have a Messiah and not know what that is all about?

RS: Yeah. What does it mean to have a Messiah and know what that's all about, but that Messiah is murdered. The resurrection, cheesy interpretation says the resurrection makes everything fine. It doesn't. The Messiah's task is to turn the world right side up. Does the world look right side up to you?

JC: Yeah. And I mean, I smirk at that because there's no way—I would need to be put into a mental asylum if I thought that the world was right side up. I would self-commit.

TB: But yet the story persists and the movement persists and that to me means that this is a revolutionary process, not a revolutionary moment. This is a whole sort of sequence of events that we get to be an active participant in. And so, hearing the story changes us, which slowly changes the world if it's done well. And it's stupid to read this story if the empire wins, and the empire won and yet we're still reading the story. So, either we're stupid or something else is going on and we have to redefine what win means.

JC: Right. And Robert Farrar Capon would say that Jesus is the greatest loser to ever exist and that his main experience in this world was to lose. He's a loser and he came for the losers, the lost, the least, the left out.

TB: So there's your other sermon title. This could be "Get In, Loser."

JC: "Get In, Losers."

TB: But seriously, you know?

JC: No, totally. Totally.

TB: And the funny thing is in this scene, everyone's a loser except for the woman with the jar. Even Jesus.

JC: Right. Right.

RS: The other thing I've been thinking about since I sent this off to you is Pope Leo's encyclical, which ends with a really, I think, profound reflection on the body of Christ. By which he means, as theologians have meant for a good while, us. So the woman anoints the body of Christ—us—for burial.

TB: Well, I mean, and Jesus talks about that all the time, right? Those who lose their life will gain it. The last will be first, the first will be last.

RS: That's exactly what I was thinking.

TB: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies or remains a single grain. I mean, Jesus mentions this all the time. We hear it from the pulpit every week and yet we're still surprised when this is the truth.

JC: Whoever wants to be the greatest, you got to be the least.

TB: Yeah. Become like a child.

JC: If you want to win, you have to lose.

RS: And for me, they asked me to guest-edit this volume of *Currents* the week after Alex Pretti was murdered, and therefore just a short bit longer after Renee Good was murdered. Along with a great many other people who were killed or kidnapped. And it seemed to me that reflection on what it means to tell Messiah stories in a world where people are murdered in the streets for doing the simplest and most ordinary of things. If we are anointed, if we, the body of Christ, are anointed for burial, I have to wonder what that means in this historical moment.

TB: Yeah. Well, and Richard, I mean, Renee Good was being a mom. She was trying to protect kids. Alex Pretti was being a nurse. He was trying to help. And yeah, what does it mean to die when you're doing what you're meant to do? I think it's a great lens to think about this and you don't need to lift up martyrs to do it. You could just lift up ordinary people, but what does it mean to die doing what you were meant to do? This is exactly kind of what she's setting Jesus up for, right? Anointing his head, "You're going to die doing what you're meant to do." Thank you.

JC: Yeah.

TB: Good luck.

RS: Yeah.