

**Kirkwall Presbyterian Church**  
***'Mark: his second chance; a profitable servant'***  
**Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-5, 13; 14:26-28; 15:36-41**

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**By Keith Marcy**

Most of us have two given names. My mother always went by her second name, Eleanor. I still remember the shock of visiting her in the hospital after surgery and reading her name on the foot of her bed, *'Florence Marcy.'* Mark, the author of the gospel bearing his name also went by *'John'* or *'John Mark'*.

Our first glimpse of this fellow happened on the night of Jesus' arrest. I would describe him as a curious teenager. Clad only in his nightshirt, he followed the procession of the Jewish temple police and religious leaders led by Judas as they paraded out of the city to the Mount of Olives. As Jesus was bound, the 11 disciples fled. Mark got a little too close. He may have yelled a word of protest. He was grabbed by the guards. But he kicked like a mule, bit like a crocodile, wiggled out of his garment and fled naked. He won the cross-country mile back to his mother's house in Jerusalem!

His mother was one of the Mary's in Scripture, a woman of some wealth – owning a house, with a heavy locked door, and having at least one servant, Rhoda. She was probably a widow. Mark is the only child mentioned. She was a woman of faith and bravery. She was brave enough to host a believers' prayer meeting pleading for the safety for the imprisoned disciple, Peter, after Herod had turned against anyone professing faith in the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. We can safely assume then, that her son Mark, knew the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and that Jesus' teaching and miracles had matched them perfectly.

Mark may have lacked the guiding influence of a father, but he had a cousin named Barnabas who took this young man under his wing. Ralph read the portrait of this man painted by Dr. Luke who wrote the book of Acts.

*'When he [Barnabas] arrived [from Jerusalem] and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.'* (Acts 11:23-24)

That was Mark's cousin, who drew alongside this young man to help him grow up in the faith.

Antioch was one of the towns believers from Jerusalem fled to in order to escape the persecution that was rampant. Stephen had been stoned to death simply because he was a man who proclaimed that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. How did Mark get from Jerusalem to Antioch? Context would imply that Barnabas took him.

The church in Antioch thrived. Many people – both Jews and Greeks became believers. As new believers, they had to be taught how to live to be a light for Jesus. Barnabas saw he needed help. He went to Tarsus to find the converted Paul. *“Hey! I need you to help me teach a spiritually hungry people!”* Faith grew! Numbers grew! The Holy Spirit said, *“Now it is time to spread the Word to new frontiers. Send Paul and Barnabas to do the work I have for them.”*

So, Paul and Barnabas sailed for Cyprus, taking John Mark with them as a helper. I add the word, *‘apprentice.’* The work went well on Cyprus. Barnabas had relatives there. Many believed. There was one who opposed them – a sorcerer – a man of the devil, who was an attendant of the ruler of the Island. God struck him blind. The ruler, because of this and the Gospel message, became a believer. The missionary trio sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. Then something happened. They had no more than stepped onto the planks of the dock, when Mark announced, *“I’m going home.”* But why? Luke is silent. If it was any of our business, the record would have told us. It does not. Volumes of reasons have been written. Scripture does not give us a clue. So, we accept what it says. John Mark left and returned to Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas soldiered on. Opposition was unbelievable – from the Jews! The message was, *“Your Messiah has come. He died for your sins. He rose again as a visible sign God accepted His death on your behalf, then returned to Heaven. Believe. Be Baptized. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* The Jews said, *“We’re going to kill you.”* Nevertheless, small groups believed and churches were planted in every town. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to a rejoicing group of Christians.

After a long time, Paul said, *“Barnabas, let’s go on another trip to see how the believers we left are making out.”*

Barnabas said, *“Great idea! I’ll tell Mark to pack his bag!”*

Paul said, *“You will not. He defected in Perga. We are not taking that guy with us.”*

Barnabas said, *“He deserves a second chance. We are taking him along.”*  
*“We are not!”*

*“We are so!”*

**“Are not!”**

**“Yes, we are!”**

The argument was irreconcilable. These two men of God parted company. Paul chose Silas to go with him back to Galatia. Barnabas took Mark and went to the island of Cyprus to continue the work there.

Two teams went out instead of just one.

Twice as many believers were encouraged.

Twice as many heard the Gospel.

It seems probable that Mark wrote the account of Jesus' life on earth for the people of the Island of Cyprus – some of whom were his cousins.

How long did Paul hold his grudge against Mark?

For quite a while.

But in his final letter from a Roman prison, in a letter sent to Timothy, he wrote: *“Get Mark and bring him with you to see me for he is useful to me in ministry.”* (2 Timothy 4:11)

Barnabas gave Mark another chance, and Mark became a profitable servant of God.

Three take aways:

1. A disagreement between believers cannot muzzle the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. Barnabas, the encourager, did not give up on Mark. As a result, he grew in faith to become useful, even to Paul!
3. Because of Mark, we have a succinct account of Jesus' life and teachings. I challenge you to read the Gospel according to Mark in one sitting. Then you will appreciate something of Mark's usefulness in ministry.

Next week I hope to look at the life and ministry of another young man, Timothy. Stay tuned!