

Empty **tombs/homes**



A Lenten Retreat on Mark 16:1-8
Facilitators' Guide

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Introduction and Background

The purpose of this retreat is to provide a resource through which to engage communities and individuals of faith. Its intention is to create spaces for biblical study and theological reflection through the lens of contemporary struggles for social justice—struggles that take place in a society increasingly faced by the abandonment of the majority, in the midst of unheard of abundance for the few. This study approaches the struggle for social justice through a human rights organizing model. In this model people of faith can be leaders regardless of whether they are laypersons or ordained clergypersons. It envisions that communities and individuals of faith are an integral part of the struggle for human rights and the movement to end poverty and injustice, because they, like all people in the United States, live in a society defined by a growing polarity between wealth and poverty.

This retreat is ecumenical in its orientation. The impetus for developing this study came from United Workers, in collaboration with St. Anthony of Padua–Most Precious Blood and St. Dominic Catholic parishes in Baltimore, Maryland. United Workers (UW) is a human rights organization led by low-wage workers. Founded in Baltimore, United Workers is leading the struggle for fair development, as well as the human rights to housing, health care, and a healthy environment. Fair development uses public resources to benefit the community over private profit, and is guided by the human rights principles of universality, equity, participation, transparency and accountability. United Workers is committed to developing and uniting leaders in the struggle for fair development, which is a part of the larger movement to achieve human rights for all.

The themes of this study—the liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter and the current housing crisis—reflect the particularities and concerns of the communities for which this Bible study series was first developed, but are themes that are certainly applicable to other communities and contexts as well. The housing crisis in Baltimore, which is similar to the conditions experienced in many cities across the U.S., was an issue of deep and immediate concern for the communities in which this study was developed. Despite the almost 20 per cent vacancy rate in Baltimore City, there are two poor renters for every affordable and available unit in the City.

Human Rights

Human Rights Principles and the Fair Development Campaign

Most Baltimore neighborhoods are marked by vacant housing, foreclosures, unemployment, poorly performing schools, fire house and recreation center closings and diminishing city services—an economic situation reflected in many cities across the U.S. today. In the past 40 years, city leaders, in response to changes in the economy, have and continue to look to economic development and the privatization of public goods as solutions to these problems. Significant public resources have been, and continue to be, used to transform old industrial areas into tourist sites featuring restaurants, retail stores, and other forms of hospitality and entertainment. While this development produces some jobs, work in these sectors is low paying, without health care benefits and opportunity for upward mobility, and is hostile to worker organizing.

These failed development policies benefit primarily private developers and real estate speculators, while most city residents and communities are still struggling to meet their needs. The Fair Development Campaign organizes for development and human rights that improve the well-being of all city residents and communities. The purpose of a multi-issue approach under the banner of Fair Development is that each of these issues is interconnected with others. For example, many foreclosures are due to bankruptcy related to health care costs. Fair development must address all economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of people's lives in a coordinated way that connects up different issue-based struggles and increases communities' abilities to meet their fundamental needs. As a human rights movement, the Fair Development Campaign seeks to build deep unity across all lines of division, including race, geography, gender, language and religion.

To this end, Fair Development is guided by the following human rights principles:

- *Universality* – Development should benefit all; displace none.
- *Equity* – Development's benefits must be shared equitably and prioritize communities most in need.
- *Participation* – Development decisions involving public subsidies require public participation.
- *Transparency* – Development decisions must be open and transparent.
- *Accountability* – Publicly aided developers must implement development that fulfills these human rights principles or be held accountable.

United Workers' Human Rights Organizing Model

The purpose of United Workers' human rights organizing model is to build a movement to end poverty and injustice, led by the poor. At the center of this model is the work of developing and uniting leaders, especially from the ranks of the poor, as well as leaders from every sector of society that are committed to human rights values. Human rights values include dignity for all, respect for all and the sanctity of life. Through leadership development and human rights education, leaders engage in "reflective action." Through this method of action and reflection the power of the poor is built through organization, using campaigns as schools to develop and unite leaders. Organization and community are built through the Fair Development Campaign, projects of survival that meet people's basic needs, creating community through the arts, culture and faith, and connecting with a network of organizations also committed to building the movement to end poverty and injustice.

History of Human Rights Organizing

One of the major historical inspirations for United Workers' struggle for human rights is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign. King was a Baptist minister whose speeches and writings were deeply influenced by the Bible. In the last years of his life, King's

work represented a major shift from organizing for civil right to human rights. In 1967 King realized that President Johnson's War on Poverty—as well as the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965)—were not addressing the realities of exploitation and racism faced by the poor and dispossessed. In an April 1967 speech against the war in Vietnam, King spoke against the “tripartite evils” of militarism, racism and poverty. Building on this stance, the organization of the Poor People's Campaign was announced in December 1967. By the launch of the campaign 3,000 poor people, including blacks, whites, Latinos and American Indians would be mobilized in nine different caravans. These caravans would converge on Washington D.C. One of the major demands of the Campaign would be the passage of an Economic Bill of Human Rights by Congress.

In March 1968, King was invited to Memphis to support a black sanitation workers' strike against the city, and was assassinated there on April 4, 1968. In the wake of King's death, his lieutenants continued to organize the Poor People's Campaign. As “Mule Train” caravans from across the country arrived in Washington, D.C., a shantytown named Resurrection City was built on the National Mall to serve as a base of operations. The high point of the campaign was the Solidarity Day Rally for Jobs, Peace and Freedom on June 19, 1968, although Resurrection City was forced to close soon thereafter. One of the many lessons United Workers draws from the Poor People's Campaign is the need to develop and unite not just one, but many, leaders. Another lesson is the importance of the unity of the poor and dispossessed across color lines, and all other lines that divide, in building the movement to end poverty and injustice.

Role of the Bible in Building the Movement to End Poverty

The U.S. today is defined both by a growing polarity between wealth and poverty, and the pervasiveness of religion. Religion, especially the Judeo-Christian tradition, has historically played a significant role in shaping the values of people in the U.S. through sacred texts, images, shared beliefs, and the organization of institutions. Christianity continues to deeply shape the U.S. context, and as a “religion of the book,” the Bible plays a foundational role in shaping the culture, beliefs, values, and ethics of people in the U.S., whether they specifically identify as Christian or not.

Like Christianity itself, the Bible has the potential to be both oppressive and liberating. It has been used to justify positions on both sides of every major social struggle in U.S. history. Today it has the power to, and provides resources for, both sanctifying and justifying the status quo, and articulating a vision for a more just society. United Workers believes that the power of faith can affirm the human rights values of dignity for all, respect for all and the sanctity of life, and asserts that the Bible has a definitive role to play in the struggle for human rights in the U.S.

Methodology

Through collective study, the stories of the Bible are brought into conversation with today's stories of the organized poor and the struggle to achieve human rights. The purpose of bridging this gap between the Bible's texts and contexts and our own is to explore ways in which these stories can speak to, and potentially intersect with, one another. This retreat, like any United Workers leadership development process, is one way in which to develop and unite leaders

committed to changing the conditions of growing inequality and poverty that affect everyone. Deep and systematic study is one way in which leaders can unite to challenge this status quo.

The methodology of this Bible study takes both text and context seriously. The texts for this study are both the biblical texts themselves, as well as the contemporary “texts” of the lives of people committed to the struggle for human rights. This method interprets biblical texts within their literary, and well as historical, contexts. It also interprets contemporary “texts” within their respective social, political and economic contexts.

The methodology of this study is primarily dialogical. Through this discussion-based approach, the voices and experiences of the participants themselves are placed at the center of biblical and theological reflection.

Two major influences on this Bible study series are the Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary’s methodology of “Reading the Bible with the Poor,” and the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research at University of KwaZulu-Natal’s methodology of “Contextual Bible Study.”

Curriculum Components

There are several interconnected components to this curriculum for a workshop on Mark 16:1-8.

Notes for Facilitators

The “Notes for Facilitators” are a resource for implementing this retreat. It is strongly recommended that facilitators read through the “Introduction and Background” and “Notes for Facilitators” before organizing and/or implementing this Bible study.

An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

A brief introduction to Mark is a resource for both facilitators and participants. It provide answers to some “introductory questions” about Mark as a whole, such as authorship, date of writing, structure and themes. This information can be used to understand and interpret specific texts in Mark their literary and historical contexts.

Questions for Study

The “Questions for Study” are designed as a resource for the facilitator and/or as a handout to the participants. It includes the appointed biblical texts from Mark in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation, as well as questions in three parts. The three-part structure of the questions is adapted from the Ujamaa Centre’s Contextual Bible Study methodology. The questions in part 1 focus on “community consciousness,” drawing on the resources and experiences of the participants. The questions in part 2 focus on “textual” and “critical consciousness,” and facilitate a close reading of the biblical text within its literary and historical context. Part 3 returns to “community consciousness,” by connecting the biblical text with the experiences and struggles of the participants.

Study Guide

The “Study Guide” is a resource primarily for the preparation of the facilitators, and can also be shared as a resource for further study to participants at the retreat. This study guide contains information that is primarily “external” to the biblical text in English translation. This study guide includes three major sections: “Context in Mark,” “Key Words and Phrases” and “Making Connections.” The “Context” section situates Mark 16:1-8 within its context within the overall literary structure of Mark. “Key Words and Phrases” highlights words and phrases that may be significant for interpreting the text as a whole. In the sections on “Making Connections” contemporary resonances with themes that may emerge in interpreting the text are suggested.

Notes for Facilitators

Who Are Facilitators?

Having multiple facilitators in this retreat allows for a variety of points of view and skill sets to be incorporated into the planning process, and potentially different styles of facilitating to be included during the retreat itself. With multiple facilitators the collective, dialogical methodology of this Bible study series can thus be incorporated in its earliest planning stages, as well as in its implementation. This retreat will consist of both large and small group discussion, including different facilitators leading the small group discussion, in addition to those that lead the large group discussion, which can diversify the leadership of this retreat even further.

The facilitators need not be ordained clergypersons or otherwise consecrated leaders that are representatives of religious institutions. The facilitators also need not be “experts” in biblical studies. This guide provides all the resources needed to plan and implement a successful Bible study, and its contents were developed in collaboration with biblical scholars.

The Role of Facilitators

The primary role of the facilitators in this Bible study series is to enable the collective process of the participants in biblical study and theological reflection. Every participant is a potential leader that can be identified and developed in the movement to end poverty and injustice. Each participant has a role to play and experience to contribute. To enable this Bible study process to take place, facilitators need strong skills in managing group dynamics, encouraging contributions from every participant, making transitions between each part of the session, and keeping the session on time. Facilitators need to enable participants to engage with the questions for discussion as they are presented to the participants. It is also important that facilitators be able to create a space that is safe and sacred, especially as the issues discussed in this Bible study series may evoke deep emotions.

Facilitators are not “experts” in the Bible. All the “answers” do not lie in the facilitators, although the facilitators should be able to provide basic information about the biblical text. It is ok to not have the answer for every question asked by the participants. When a facilitator does not know the answer to a question, rely on the resources of the group and/or plan to research the question further to report back at a later session.

Preparation for a Bible Study Session

To ensure that the content of this retreat is well prepared, read through Mark 16:1-8, as well as the passage immediately before and after it, several times. It is ideal to read the biblical text in several English translations (New Revised Standard, New American Standard, King James, The Message, etc.). The facilitators may note that English translations often vary widely from one to another, and these differences in translation can often indicate where translators are interpreting the original text. If possible, it is also recommended to read the biblical text in a second modern language, such as Spanish. (Recommended Spanish translations are the American Bible Society and the *La Biblia Latinoamericano*.) Online resources such as biblehub.com and

blueletterbible.com can be used to compare several modern translations, as well as look up words in their original Hebrew or Greek.

While studying the biblical text, also read the “Questions for Study” and “Study Guide” for the session. Reflect on how participants might respond to each question, keeping in mind that, especially for the questions in parts 1 and 3, that there is no “correct” answer. Decide if there are particular questions within each part of the session that could be focused on more than others.

An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

The historical context of both Jesus's ministry (c. 30-33 C.E.) and the writing of Mark was the foreign occupation of Palestine by the Roman Empire. There is a general consensus among New Testament scholars that Mark was written just before, during or just after 70 C.E. Therefore Mark was written about 40 years after the events of Jesus's earthly ministry, or the span of at least one generation of Jesus followers.

A major historical event that deeply influenced the writing of Mark was the Jewish War (66-70 C.E.), which took place at about the same time that Mark was written. During this war the Jewish people revolted against what was oppressive Roman rule. This conflict resulted in the complete devastation of the Jewish nation, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and the razing of Jerusalem itself in 70 C.E. The references in the "Little Apocalypse" (ch 13), in which Jesus tells his disciples "what will be the signs that all these things are about to be accomplished" (13:4), including the "desecrating sacrilege" and the appearance of false messiahs (13:2, 14-23) may be oblique allusions to events that took place during the Jewish War.

In order to write the story of Jesus, Mark was compelled to process this story through the Jewish War. The Jesus story had to be retold in response to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the place where God was present and Israel's identity as a nation was constructed. Therefore the "beginning" of Mark's gospel is the beginning of a story that was supposed to be annihilated along with Jerusalem and its Temple.

The traumatic events of the Jewish War, in which people starved to death during the siege of Jerusalem and thousands were crucified in front of the city walls for attempting to flee, are reflected in the style of Mark. There are many "sharp edges" in the narrative. For example, moments in the non-stop pace of the story are in many cases connected by the word "immediately." In another example, in the earliest manuscripts Mark ends in fear and silence (16:8). There is no proclamation of the resurrection by Jesus's disciples.

The author of Mark is anonymous but is traditionally attributed to John Mark (Acts 12:12, 15:37) as a summary of Peter's preaching (1 Pet 5:13). The "John Mark" in Acts has also been identified with the "Mark" in Paul's letters (Col 4:10, Philem 24, 2 Tim 4:11). However since Mark was a very common name in the first century C.E., it cannot be determined with certainty if these people were the same Mark.

In terms of literary structure Mark has three major sections, including: Jesus' ministry in Galilee (ch 1-8), on the way to Jerusalem (ch 8-10), and in Jerusalem (ch 11-16). Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not begin with a birth narrative. Instead it begins abruptly with "beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" (1:1) and the appearance of John baptizing in the wilderness.

Mark is unique among the four canonical gospels in that it has multiple endings. In a number of important manuscripts Mark ends at 16:8 with no indication that this ending is not original. As Mark began to circulate with Matthew, Luke and John, scribes may have added up to three additional endings to make Mark more similar to these gospels: a shorter ending with additional material, a longer ending (16:9-20), and an expanded longer ending (material after 16:14). These endings may have been attempts to "complete" Mark to follow the pattern of the other gospels.

Study Guide
Mark 16:1-8

Context in Mark

This story concludes the passion narrative, which constitutes the last major section of Mark (ch 11-16). Jesus has already shared the Passover with his disciples (14:12-25), been betrayed by Judas and arrested at Gethsemane (14:43-50), condemned as deserving death for the blasphemy that he is the Messiah in the court of the high priest (14:55-65), and handed over to Pilate, the Roman procurator that governed Judea (14:1-15). Roman soldiers beat, stripped and ridiculed Jesus before they crucified him with two robbers for the charge of being “King of the Jews” (15:16-20, 15-27). After Jesus had died (15:37), Joseph of Arimathea, a man of wealth and position among the Jews, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Then buying a linen cloth, Joseph wrapped Jesus’s body in it and laid him a tomb (15:42-46).

Key Words and Phrases

bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him (16:1)

Among the disciples only Mary Magdalene and, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, see where Jesus is placed in a tomb (15:47). All the disciples deserted Jesus and fled when Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane (14:50). After following Jesus to the court of the high priest, even Peter denies that he knows Jesus (14:72). Only a group of women, none of the male disciples, witness Jesus’s death at a distance (15:40-41), and then attempt to give Jesus some dignity in death by anointing his body.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe (16:5)

When the women enter the tomb they expect to find Jesus’s dead body. But instead of a dead Jesus they see a living young man. Jesus’s resurrection is encountered through his absence, but also the presence of an unexpected young man who inspires fear through his proclamation. Jesus is also described as wearing a white robe when he is transfigured (Mk 9:3, 6).

You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.

He has been raised; he is not here (16:6)

This verse holds a contradiction. Jesus is described specifically as crucified. Under the Roman empire crucifixion was an especially brutal form of capital punishment reserved for non-citizens that dared to challenged the power of the state. This very public and particularly shameful way to die served as a warning to others against rebellion. But a man who should have been properly dead according to Roman law and order was no longer so. Instead he is described as raised and absent.

and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (16:8)

On their way to the tomb Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome spoke among themselves, asking who would roll away the stone for them (Mk 16:3). By contrast, at the end of this story the women do not speak. They do not follow the young man’s command to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone ahead of them to Galilee (Mk 16:7). They do not speak because fear has silenced them. The first reaction to Jesus being raised is not rejoicing, but terror and amazement (Mk 16:8).

Making Connections

Where the women expected to encounter death, they encountered the living through both the young man’s presence and his words proclaiming that Jesus had been raised. The resurrection can be encountered in unexpected, unlikely places and people. In the same way that Jesus was crucified ultimately by the power of Roman imperial law, today people’s homes are “crucified” by a political and economic system whose laws condemn homes to foreclosure and abandonment. Just as Jesus was crucified yet resurrected, so too can empty houses become sites of resurrection.

Study Questions

Mark 16:1-8

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (NRSV)

Part 1

1. Read Mark 16:1-8 aloud. What words or phrases strike you in this text?
2. Reread Mark 16:1-8 aloud. What is this text about?

Part 2

3. Read Mark 15:42-47 and reread Mark 16:1-5 aloud. What are the similarities and differences between Joseph’s treatment of Jesus’s body and the women’s intentions to treat Jesus’s body? What are the expectations of the women as they walk to Jesus’s tomb? Are the women’s expectations met? Why or why not?

⁴²When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid. (NRSV)

4. Reread Mark 16:6 aloud phrase by phrase. How does the young man describe Jesus to the women? What is the significance of these descriptions?

5. Reread Mark 16:7-8 aloud. What is ironic about these verses? The earliest manuscripts of Mark conclude with 16:8. However, shorter and longer endings of Mark were added later. How is the original ending of Mark different from other gospel accounts you have heard? Why are those differences significant?

Part 3

6. Are there connections between the empty tomb and empty houses in Baltimore? If so, what are they?

7. What values, principles and resources exist in the community to address the housing crisis?

8. How are people of conscience called to respond to the housing crisis? Are there responses to the housing crisis that have not yet been considered? Do the responses that already exist address the root causes of the housing crisis? Are they effective?

9. What will we do collectively in response to this Bible study?

Retreat Schedule

- 9:00-9:20 Welcome and Introductions
- Welcome to retreat space
 - Introduction of participants with name game
- 9:20-10:00 Questions for Study Part 1
- Large group discussion
- 10:00-10:45 Questions for Study Part 2
- Small group discussion with large group report back
- 10:45-11:00 Break
- 11:00-12:00 Questions for Study Part 3
- Small group discussion with large group report back
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch
- 1:00-2:00 Housing Is a Human Right Campaign Workshop

The 3 CBS processes/movements

**CBS begins with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness'**

SEE

**In-between we re-read the Bible,
slowly, carefully and closely
using the critical resources of biblical scholarship ...
'critical consciousness'**

JUDGE

**Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)
Literary (on-text)
Socio-historical (behind-text)
Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)**

**... and ends with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness'**

ACT