

## What Have You To Do With Us?

Mark 1: 21-28

This week, we pick back up with the Gospel of Mark. For weeks as a congregation, we have celebrated special Sundays as part of our worship routine. We lifted up opportunities to remember our baptism, dipping our hands into the water as we remembered who we are and whose we are. We received Star Words to guide us into the new year, opening ourselves to their wisdom as we accepted their invitation to follow wherever they may lead. Then last week, we celebrated Laity Sunday where three of our members shared their testimonies, reminding us that our faith story is personal because it constantly connects us with the Spirit of God in our midst.

And this week, well, this week, as we slip back into our normal worship routine, okay, as normal as it gets around here... This week, as we pick things back up in the reading of the assigned text, I almost feel like we are crashing back to reality with this story from the Gospel of Mark.

Because let's face it, it is an odd text. One minute Mark is telling us Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and the next minute, without even being asked to do so, Jesus heals someone of an unclean spirit. And if that wasn't weird enough, after

the healing, Mark has Jesus simply go back to teaching, as if nothing ever happened. Then he ends this section by saying, “Jesus’ fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.”

What a minute! What just happened here? With all the twist and turns found within these few lines, it’s no surprise we feel like we are getting liturgical whiplash. We are just trying to keep up. In looking at this text, we know that somehow, someway we missed something important. So we need to figure out what we missed in order to know what to do next.

Realizing that we have been out of our normal routine for a bit, I thought it might be a good thing for us to take a few moments and go back, go back to the beginning, go back to pick up the pieces which we missed along the way. Once we do that, we will realize how appropriate this reading is for our season of Epiphany, a season in which we discover a better understanding of just who this Jesus is for us as disciples of Christ.

As we look at this text, we need to realize that while we have been celebrating special Sundays, Mark has been telling his story all along. In the lectionary readings for each week, you know the readings that all churches are supposed to look at together, trying to keep us all on the same page as the Body of Christ, the story from Mark’s Gospel continued to be shared. Meaning while we as

a community of faith took a detour from the lectionary readings, the rest of the wider church kept on reading them.

If we go back just a few verses, we can see that Mark shares the highlights of Jesus' ministry in just one chapter while it takes the other Gospel writers four or five chapters to make the same point. Mark is concise. He gives us what we need to know. No lengthy descriptions of angels singing. No long conversations about fishing with the first disciples. Mark just gives us the facts.

In Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Mark, we are told Jesus was baptized. Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted. Then he came back, called his first disciples, and now he is ready to begin his public ministry.

Now while we might wish Mark would give us just a little more details about who Jesus is, we need to realize that's the beauty of his writing. He simply gives us what we need to know, meaning if Mark is mentioning it, as readers and as people of faith, we had better pay attention.

Notice that the very first thing Jesus does as he begins his public ministry is to teach and to heal. For Mark, at this point in the story, what Jesus taught isn't as important as the fact that he taught with authority. There is something about this man's words which makes people realize he is significant. When Jesus teaches, the

people realize that he is saying something of importance. He is saying something transformative for the people of God.

“Mark wants us to know that at the outset of Jesus’ public ministry, Jesus’ presence, his very words, challenged the other perceived authoritative forces in our world, forces such as power and might, forces such as money and oppressive systems meant to separate and divide.” When Jesus speaks, he speaks with authority. For Mark, this is his way of letting us know that what Jesus says in the verses and chapters to follow, these words matter. These words will shape how we live out our faith as Jesus’ followers. So pay attention!

Which brings us to the healing. Notice that it is the unclean spirit who recognizes Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. This is Mark’s clue to us that this is not just any healing. Something bigger is happening here. And as readers, as people of faith, once again, we had better pay attention. Because this, this is the moment when all the destructive, life draining forces in the world recognize that the Kingdom of God has come near. Mark is telling us that through word and deed Jesus is uniquely empowered to usher in the reign of God. And it is starting right here, right now. So people of God, get ready!

Mark wants us to know that then as well as now, Jesus is transforming this world through word and deed. Jesus is bringing a new word about life and love.

Jesus is ushering in the Kingdom of God, a kingdom which liberates the people from the oppressive systems which define them, a kingdom which breaks barriers down, barriers meant to separate and divide. Mark is telling us Jesus is ushering in the Kingdom of God here and now, and as his followers, as his disciples, we had better be ready to do the same.

This is no ordinary man. He is the Son of the Most High God. His very words, words that free people and offer them hope, his actions, actions which open the way for all of God's creation to flourish and become new, This man who we claim as our own Lord and Savior is ushering in a new day so that all may be restored and made whole....and if this man is who we say he is, if we have really taken him as our Lord and Savior, then his very words, his very actions need to shape how we live out our faith as his disciples.

Or let me say it this way...

This week has been one of those unusual weeks in ministry, a week where I spent most of my time out of the office rather than in it. This week I have sat by beds in hospitals and nursing homes, offering words of comfort and peace. I have talked on the phone and texted members about various life events. I have had multiple conversations with colleagues out in Western KY as we all try to grapple with

another school shooting, the 11<sup>th</sup> in 2018, and we are only in the fourth week of January.

Throughout all these conversations, I was reminded again that sometimes ministry outside of our church building is just as important, maybe even more so than the ministry which happens within these walls. I say this because when we step outside of ourselves, when we allow the love and grace of God to guide our words and our actions, it shows not only those gathered here but everyone we encounter, it shows that we understand, we embrace, we celebrate the life transforming power of Jesus at work in our world, working to restore all of God's children and to make us whole.

All because we know our God is loving. We know our God is merciful and we know that our God shows up when we least expect it with arms open wide, ready to embrace us as a Beloved Child of God. This is what this broken and hurting world needs to hear and see the most right now. And as followers of Jesus Christ, we are the very ones who are called to share and show this message, not only for those of us gathered here today but for all of God's children as well.

Throughout all the conversations I had this week, I was reminded again how Jesus' words and actions tell a different story. They tell us of a God who doesn't stay away from the ugliness and brokenness of life. They tell us of a God who

shows up right there in the midst of it, drawing us near, offering us hope. Jesus' words and actions tell us that the welcome is wide and everyone is invited to come. They tell us that Jesus broke bread with sinner and saint alike and that on any given day, we could fall into either category.

As the ones who know this God, who have experienced this God in our lives, we are the very ones who are called to speak words of love with authority, to act in ways of justice and mercy. Now is the time for us to proclaim that our own Lord and Savior is ushering in a new day. We know that God is working through us, working through our actions, through our words to show the destructive forces in this world that hate and hurt will never have the last word. That here and now, within the walls of this church and for the community beyond, as disciples of the Lord Most High, we are at the right place, at the right moment, at the right time to say and to show all that love and hope will reign forevermore.

This week, throughout all the conversations and interactions I had with people from our church, with people not connected to our church, one thing became abundantly clear, that thing being as people who claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior, as ones understand how Jesus' words of grace, how his actions of justice shape the faith we live out here and now as his disciples, it became abundantly clear that when anyone asks us what does being a disciple of Christ mean to you? We simply need to reply....Everything. Thanks be to God. Amen.