

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 4, 2018
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

I Fight Authority, Authority Always Wins

At the beginning of most TV series, there are a few moments when they review what happened the previous week, so the audience is up to speed and ready for the current episode. With that in mind, “*Previously in the Gospel of Mark...*” Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum, entered the synagogue and taught. This is when they encountered a man with an unclean spirit that cried out, “*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.*” Basically, Jesus told the spirit to be quiet and leave the man—and it did—pretty amazing! Most of us have seen a horror flick, Hollywood rendition of what the people may have seen that day. Like Hollywood, after this blockbuster event, Jesus’s fame spread, and Capernaum became home base for His mission in Galilee—a place that welcomed the teacher and healer.

If I asked you what the first miracle was that Jesus performed, I think most of us would say it was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Now, I agree that turning water into wine is a miracle, but if one of you were possessed by a demon, and Denise or I got out an old copy of the “*Book of Occasional Services*,” called to the demon to come out of you—and then, convulsing and screaming, perhaps in a funnel of smoke it was expelled, I think I would call that a miracle. (All of us may also need therapy, just sayin’) Only Mark, makes the story of Jesus confronting evil spirits, His initial public action. This action underpins the foundation of Jesus’s authority—authority that comes from God.

Think about authority for a moment, what does having authority really mean? If you are a King, you have *inherited your authority* to rule. If you are the president of a corporation, you have been *delegated authority* to make business decisions. A professor has *achieved authority* based upon years of study and research. And, if you are an attorney—a scribe in the time of Jesus, one who interrupts the law—the scribes do not find the source of the law within themselves. Jesus was clearly different, because when he taught in the synagogue, he referred to no source of authority other than Himself. Jesus is the source, and without saying it, He is laying claim to being the Christ, the Son of God. As Christians, what is the source of our authority? What are we called to do with that authority? These are big questions. God is the source of all authority, and all that I am/we are comes from God—this is the foundation of our Christian faith. The Bible is the source of authoritative instruction, the guide that maps our journey with Christ. With God as our source and the Bible to guide us, Jesus calls us to courageously love others—no exceptions—and to carry the message to everyone, even those outside of our comfort zones.

If you have never read the Gospel of Mark beginning to end, I suggest you consider taking that on—perhaps as a Lenten discipline. Mark has a mission to make it clear; that Jesus is the Son of God, He has come to bring reconciliation and healing the world, and to call disciples to go out and spread the good news to everyone.

Today’s Gospel is focused on two things, healing and acting as God’s agent in the world. The day Jesus and the disciples had in Capernaum was busy, exciting, invigorating, and a success! The world was hurting, and Jesus came to heal. When things break we work to fix, restore, or replace them. When people break we *lift up our prayers for them to be put back the way they were...without illness or injury. We all know how illness and injury can disrupt our lives, hinder us, and keep us from achieving our goals. We want things put back the way they were. We want them restored. And Jesus is the answer!*

It took me a long time to understand that healing is not just about having a physical ailment made better—not all illness is curable, not all people recover. We are human and subject to the laws of nature. We can however, with God’s help, make peace with our illnesses and heal mentally and spiritually.

After Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law it was sundown, and people begin bringing the sick and possessed to Jesus for healing—the whole town was gathered outside of the door—everyone.

Wow, this was a big win for Jesus, he was more popular than, the Beatles! Capernaum rejoiced, and it was a safe, secure place for Jesus and the disciples, and the sick were being brought to Him. The next morning, before sunrise, Jesus goes off on his own, to recharge and to pray.

Still, it is tempting to bask in fame, and put down roots in a place where you found welcome and success. For one brief moment, I bet Jesus wondered, *Should I stay or should I go?* But he knew the purpose of His ministry was to bring good news and healing to the whole world.

When the disciples finally find Jesus praying alone, they are still riding high on the success of yesterday—this was their Super Bowl win. “*Everyone is searching for you!*” they exclaimed. I imagine the disciples wanted to stay where they were, in a safe place, where the people are over the moon with Jesus, and the disciples are energized, in the “zone” if you will, and ready for another successful day of teaching and healing, in Capernaum.

Jesus answers, “*Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*”

Jesus knew he had to go and meet the people right where they were.

Just as Jesus called the disciples, He has called us to take up the work of proclaiming good news and healing. There is a whole world out there, waiting for us, as individuals and as a community to share God’s love and bring healing to a hurting world.

Do not get comfortable with where you are and what you do, go and spread the Gospel! How you ask? Pay attention to opportunities to serve, to give of your time, talent and treasure to heal a hurting world—feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, console the sick and grieving, and give to the poor. Be good stewards of all of God’s creation—for more ideas, see the announcements in the bulletin.

All of us are called to ministry, and ministry is full of possibilities. Be of good courage and reach for something beyond yourself. Live into the wonder of God’s creation, and engage in new and creative ways to spread the good news! It is easier to stay in a safe place, but like the Gospel, Jesus bids us to move forward.

If you took anything from the scriptures from the last two weeks, I want you to understand that there are evil and demons in the world, just as sure as there are angels and good in the world. Be the good. Be good, do good, and take a chance on Jesus. Following His example will not be easy, but it will be worth it.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?” These words from Isaiah tell us that, Jesus is Lord—follow Him. In this world, be the good, do the good—be do be do be do. Amen

Resources:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cana>

McKenna, David L., *The Communicator’s Commentary*, World Books, Waco, TX, 1982

Donahue, S.J., John R. and Harrington, S. J., Daniel J., *Sacra Pagina: Mark*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2002

The Rev. Liz Tomlinson – St. Paul’s eNews

www.beginningcatholic.com/church-authority

www.victorious.org/pub/authority-christian-102