

A Savior Who Disturbs & Disrupts

Scripture: Mark 1:21 - 28

Jesus has a message. Jesus is an individual not with just words to fill an hour or so but he is one with a message that can make the difference between life and death. His message has the power to heal and make us whole. This is how Mark presents Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.

Jesus has a message that is disturbing to some and disrupting to others. Jesus' ministry is full of the 'Double D's', it is disturbing and disruptive!

A politician will often campaign at selected sites that symbolize the issues of the campaign. The politician may speak at a college to articulate his/her position on education. The politician may speak at a factory to talk about jobs and the economy. The politician may speak in front of a federal building to give his/her stance on taxation. The point the politician is making is that he/she embarks on a campaign and they choose a site to speak which will make the biggest impact on what he/she has to say.

According to Mark, Jesus chose a special place from which to speak. I am NOT saying that Jesus was a politician but I am saying that Jesus chose special places to give his messages. Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus spent almost three years of his ministry living with Peter. The synagogue in Capernaum probably did not have a Rabbi because it was a small community. They would have town's people get up and read scripture in the synagogue each day. The people of God came to hear God's word for their lives. There would have been a lot of talking in the synagogue. There were probably men in the back corner of the synagogue discussing today's weather and in the other back corner were men sharing a story. But when Jesus spoke something was different. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Capernaum, something was very different. What was different was not what he read but what was different is that Jesus spoke with authority!

I visited the ruins of this synagogue in Capernaum on my trip to the Holy Land a few years ago. As I walked around the temple which had no roof any more, I became emotional. I started crying when I stood behind the table where Jesus would have opened scripture up to read. I thought that my feet were now standing where Jesus stood! My best friend in ministry, Rev. Terry Ford, who I went north last weekend to spread his ashes at Nordmont Christian Camp, came up to me in the Temple at Capernaum and he put his arm around me and prayed with me. That will be a moment I will never forget!

It says that Jesus spoke as one having authority. There is something powerful about people who speak with authority. There is something special about a person whose message is as much in their hearts as it is in their minds. A person speaking with authority speak from the heart.

Have you ever heard a person speak with authority? I did when I heard Rev. Fred Craddock speak a few times. For two straight General Assemblies of our denomination, Rev. Craddock was the key note speaker and when he got up to deliver his message a strange thing happened each time. Every minister present would get out a note pad to take notes from Rev. Craddock's message. Rev. Craddock was a great speaker and story teller. He spoke with authority. He spoke from the heart.

At our Regional assembly in Pittsburgh some years ago, I was one of people in charge of youth activities. And before one of our activities, I was to give a brief prayer to the youth. Just before getting up to pray, Rev. Craddock walked into the room to visit with the youth. He then hung around the room and then my turn came to pray. I can remember my hands were shaking. I began to sweat bullets! I did my prayer and the loudest voice to say 'Amen' was Rev. Craddock. I guess my prayer was given with authority and it came from my heart!

A story - two men recited the 23rd Psalm. One of them was a well-known actor and the other was a man who recently had lost a loved one.

The actor's rendering of the 23rd Psalm was beautiful and well read. Everyone enjoyed hearing the rich words of the beloved Psalm spoken in his clear baritone voice. All the inflections and pauses were perfect. They applauded his reading.

Then the other man spoke who had lost a loved one recently. He stumbled a bit. The words were broken with unnatural punctuations of silence. His words changed in pitch as his voice struggled with emotions. As he read, the well-known Psalm, his eyes filled with tears. When he finished his reading, there were tears in the eyes of the listeners and the only sound the people made was the blowing of noses.

It was then that the actor stood up again and shared these words - 'I know the Psalm but this man knows the shepherd!' That is the difference authority makes!

Have you ever noticed how when someone speaks with authority there will be those who hear and rejoice, and there will be those who want to resist what is being said.

Jesus spoke with authority and he created a crisis. In today's text, the man with the unclean spirit cries 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.'

I wonder if this ancient scene is not lived out in the church again and again today. Jesus came to a world that was immersed in religion, but it was a very tired religion. It was a religion that had everything completely under control. It was a religion that offered a God who did things exactly as they wanted him to do. There was no mystery, no surprise, and no conversion. When they were confronted with Jesus, they felt tormented. They said - 'Do not destroy us, Jesus!' They seemed to cry out loud to Jesus.

When Christ comes to us, the doors of life are flung open. When Christ comes to us there is wonder and amazement. When we meet Jesus we know that great chunks of life exist that cannot be wrapped snugly inside a blanket of rational explanation. It is easy to feel disoriented by Jesus' strange ethics. It is easy to be disturbed by Jesus' way of including everyone. It is disruptive to feel Jesus' religious convention.

We do not have a clinical name for the condition of the man who is healed by Jesus that day in the synagogue in our scripture today. All we know is that the man was healed and the people were amazed. This text suggests that there may be times when, like the ancient man, we too are in the grip of an evil spirit. A spirit that keeps everything under control, keeps everything tied down, and keeps everything neat and safe.

I believe the Gospel invites us to be healed by the authority of God. The Gospel takes the authority of God to keep our minds open to wonder, to be ready for the tug of God's spirit on our spirits. The Gospel takes radical healing to be open to the grace of a new day. The Gospel lets us feel our knees quiver at the sight of a mother loving her child. The Gospel allows our minds to be confounded by the grace of forgiveness. Oh, the Gospel does this - and so much more!

The authority of God commands us to imagine a new world. This imagination is so needed in a dark and cold world. Like the ancient people, we are tired of the same old ways of thinking and being. We have had the words with us so long that they have gone flat in our souls. We know the words but they have become stale. The words - 'Love your neighbor, Care for the least, Show mercy to all' - are in our language but something is lacking between the words and the deeds.

We need the authority of God to set us free to begin the exciting and dangerous work of imagining a new world. Perhaps it would be better to say that we need the authority of God to free us to use our imaginations in a new way.

*It takes imagination to create weapons of destruction and it takes imagination to create communities of healing and love.

*It takes imagination to rob people of their dignity through corrupt systems and it takes imagination to offer everyone the opportunity to live as a child of God.

The question is - Will we submit our imaginations to God's authority?

When we do, there will be a resistance. Someone will cry out loud - 'Do not torment me! Or Do not do that!' But, be of good cheer because we follow the one whose authority is such that it cannot be silenced! We are invited to go forth and engage the work of creating a new day and a new world. It will be hard and there will be resistance but it will be the most exciting work any people could ever be asked to be about!

It all begins today! It all begins in this place! Truly listen to the words again from the Gospel of Mark 1:21 – 22 and 27 - 28

They went to Capernaum and when the Sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teachings for Jesus taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes....

They were all amazed and they kept asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching - with authority! Jesus commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him. At once Jesus' fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

We have this authority and before the authority of God and Jesus Christ we have a wonderful power!

Let us pray:

O God, may we use this authority to share the good news of Jesus Christ because there is power through him that each of us can tap into. Bless the ministry of the Bethany Beach Christian (Disciples of Christ) and allow us to grow in faith. AMEN.