

Sermon 31 Jan 2021

Good Day All

How we have been blessed with the wonderful rain we have had this past week. Praise God.

Wendy and I are both better except I am suffering from the post Covid syndrome of exhaustion. Yvonne Hall will bear me out that there are some days that you are so tired that you feel that you can't lift your arms to do anything.

The authority of Jesus

Mark 1 :21-28

From the moment Jesus entered into the synagogue. It was apparent things were different. As He began to teach, they became increasingly aware that Jesus was no ordinary Rabbi. What made his teaching so different? Was it because it was bible centred? The synagogue held the scriptures in the highest regard, it was the word of God. The Scribes knew the Scriptures well because they had copied them by hand and made sure nothing was left out. They were the authorities on the Scriptures.

Jesus comes on the scene. How much they knew of him is hard to know. Reports may have come back to them about what He had done or about His baptism. In the Synagogue any Jew of any age could stand up and request to both read and comment on the scriptures. Jesus got up to teach and things were never the same again.

Jesus had no degree, nor had he been to seminary. There is no indication that He had been a disciple of one of the great Rabbi's like Gamaliel. He came with no letters of recommendation or an ordination certificate. He just appeared and taught. His authority came from His teachings. The people noticed that His teaching was more superior than the Scribes. It wasn't His skill of speaking. It was who He was and what He taught.

It is important to know that his authoritative teaching was recognised that morning in the synagogue. The teaching of Jesus was always first and then after that came the miracles, signs and wonders that would confirm His words by a demonstration of power.

Jesus is teaching in the Synagogue. His authority fills not just the place but each person there. This man with the unclean spirit appears on the scene. The presence of Jesus, the man with a clean Spirit, draws out the presence of the man with an unclean spirit. Jesus has that effect on people. His Authority and teaching reveal the truth about His listeners lives.

We do not know how long the man with the unclean spirit had been there before he

began to act out. Was he a regular worshipper?. The demon could not sit still through the message, he recognised the authority of Jesus. So why did the demon start acting out at that point and cry out. Was he trying to derail what Jesus was doing and how was he going to do that?. Was it to draw the attention of the people from Jesus? Was it that he could no longer stand to hear the words of Jesus?

The first request that the demon made was that he be left alone. Demons are parasites they have to live in humans. The thought of being cast out frightened them. They were afraid of being destroyed. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus, the Son of God. The demons went on to confess Jesus as being “The Holy one of God.” We must remember that in the end, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

The man with the unclean spirit is an image of what the lives of those in the synagogue looked like. His uncleanness is not about personal hygiene, immorality or being bad. Instead his presence in “the synagogue” described the disease of their souls, their fragmented lives, and the many voices within them. In looking at him they see themselves and are astounded by the contrast of the one who has the unclean spirit.

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” He senses the distance between his life and Jesus'. His words betray his isolation. It's not however, just about him. He speaks not only for himself but for all those in the synagogue that day. He represents every one who has ever experienced brokenness in their lives. He is the spokesman for all who feel disconnected from themselves, from others or from God. He represents the human condition. He longs for Jesus to put him back together again.

We are not so different. Each one of us longs for Jesus to put us back together again because we too know the separation and brokenness in our own lives. We have lived in isolation. We have been trapped in grief. We have carried the burden of guilt. The truth of those situations often reveals itself in the many personas we wear.

At some levels we all project various personas or images of how we want others to see us and how we want to see ourselves. We may smile and say, “yes everything is fine,” when the truth is we are hanging on by a thread and not sure how we'll manage to get through the day.

We use our personas as a mask to hide the truth of what our life is like and who we are. The tragedy is that they also hide who we might become. It seems those masks most often arise from the many voices that live within us. They are the voices of condemnation and guilt, grief, fear, anger and judgement. They are voices demanding perfectionism, asking “What have you done for me today?” We are never able to do or be enough. Every one of those is a false voice, the voice of the unclean spirit that separates us from our authentic self, from all that we love, and all who love us.

This is exactly what Jesus came for. He silences our false voices. He casts out all personas and makes us people with a clean spirit. He has everything to do with us. He stands before us as a mirror image of who we can become. There is no aspect of our life about which He is not concerned. He calls us into our true self, the one made in the image and likeness of God. He calls us back into the beauty and wholeness of our original creation. Today's gospel is as much about calling forth as it is about casting out. They are two sides of the same coin.

The true voice and the true images are always present. That is why the man with the unclean spirit can cry out, "I know who you are, the Holy one of God." He speaks from a deep place of knowing. His recognition of Jesus is at a profound level of recognition of himself and his own holiness.

The people in the synagogue had been amazed by Jesus' teaching. Now they were utterly amazed at Jesus' authority over the demons as well. Notice carefully what they said, "What new teaching is this?" They noticed that even the demons obeyed Him. The people went out and spread the fame of Jesus through the whole region of Galilee. I don't think they really understood what had happened, but they were excited. Matthew mentions that His fame went far beyond Galilee to the entire province of Syria. This would be a mixed blessing. Some would come to hear Him teach while other would come for healing while others came to have demons driven out.

Jesus did not regard human fame in that He would not let it affect His mission. His mission at this point was not to overthrow and set up an earthly Kingdom. He had come to do the most unpopular thing and that was to die on the cross. The time would come when those Jews who had listened to His teaching in amazement would turn on Him. On Palm Sunday they cheered Him and on Friday they demanded that He be crucified

We can go wrong in handling authority and power. It is said that "power corrupts." The more power and authority one has the greater the temptation to abuse it. Jesus is the example of how to use authority. It has not been given by men but by God. Jesus was commissioned by the Father at His baptism. The Spirit filled Him. We in turn have been commissioned by Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are to submit to authority if we are to use it properly.

May we realise that all authority rests in God and He is the only one who can give it. He gave it to Jesus who then gave it to us. May we realise we are always responsible to act according to His will. We are always responsible to Him as to how we use it. He will hold us accountable for the way we use His authority.

Amen

