

4 Epiphany (B)
Mark 1: 21-28
Jesus & the Scribes: Speaking with Authority
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- ✘ Overview
 - ✓ Today's gospel reading is about Jesus setting up his ministry headquarters in Capernaum, a fairly sizeable town on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee
 - ✓ In Capernaum Mark sets the stage early on for two recurring themes in his Gospel, and we'll see these played out as the rest of the liturgical year
 - The hostility between Jesus and the Scribes
 - Jesus being seen by the people (and feared by the scribes) as one who teaches with authority
- ✘ The scribes:
 - ✓ In the synagogue at Capernaum begins the conflict that will be played out over the 16 chapters of Mark's gospel:
 - "They (being the men in the synagogue) were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."
 - ✓ Who were the scribes?
 - They were found in both the priestly party (the Saducees) and the party of the Pharisees.
 - The scribes of the Pharisees were the leaders of what was to become—after the period of the New Testament—a movement known rabbinic Judaism, and would be eventually known as the "Rabbis" (footnote: the name "scribe" came to define a teacher of children and a composer of legal documents.)
 - They were entrusted with many responsibilities: record keeping; handling of correspondence; maintenance of the archives, and some took part in scholarly research
 - They also functioned as lawyers (Lk 5:17) and judges (Mt 23:2)
- ✘ So here we have Jesus, "speaking with authority," in contrast to the Scribes speaking with...what?

- ✓ The scribes spoke with what can be termed “custodianship.”
 - The scribes’ authority was based on their ability to recite the opinion of many teachers (rabbis) on a given topic.
 - They interpreted existing law; they did not create it.
- ✗ On the other hand Mark states that “Jesus teaches with authority”
 - ✓ Repeated twice: v 22: about his words and in v 27: about his actions in performing an exorcism on the man with an unclean spirit.
 - And this action of the cleansing of a man with an unclean spirit is the central point in Mark’s story about the Jesus preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum:
 - There was a clear continuity between what Jesus said and what he did, and each of these validated the other.
 - ◆ Jesus' word had authority because when he spoke, it came to pass. "Come out of him," Jesus commanded of the unclean spirit. "And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.”
 - ◆ We see this happen again and again in Mark:
 - ✦ Jesus stretched out his hand to a leper and said, “Be made clean!” and immediately the leprosy left him) [1:41]
 - ✦ To the paralytic man lowered through the roof: “Stand up, take up your mat and go home.” and immediately he did and walked out the door [2:5]
 - This Speaking with Authority calls to mind God's creation of the world as told in Genesis 1. God spoke, and it was so! "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3).
- ✗ The authority of Jesus to rescue people from the demonic forces which enslave them is Mark’s way of informing the reader that Jesus is not an ordinary human but the son of God,
 - ✓ And Jesus did not depend on the authority of some previous expert but was the expert himself. He was given the authority to create laws, not just to interpret them.
 - ✓ And his new teachings brought about increasing hostility from the Pharisees. The Pharisees asked Jesus:
 - By what authority does he forgive sins [2:6]

- Why does he associate with tax collectors and sinners [2:16b]
 - Why do his disciples not fast [2:18b]
 - Why do his disciples break the Sabbath [2:24]
 - By what authority does Jesus heal on the Sabbath? [3:2]
- ✘ And these were not just questions about theological niceties, as they would be in our own time:
- in our country, religion and politics how we live out our daily lives can be nicely stovepiped and separated from one another, and one doesn't really have to affect the other.
- ✓ But in Jesus time, religion, politics, health, diet, the court system, the social structure, one's place in society were all of one piece.
- And when one challenges authority, you challenge the whole fabric of society
 - And for that reason, Jesus develops determined enemies.
 - And although the coming of God's reign in Jesus brought healing and forgiveness for others, for Jesus it will mean opposition and death
- ✘ Lessons
- ✘ For James: Jesus' Actions are His Message
- Jesus, Mark tells us, speaks with authority, but, at the same time, Mark tells us little about the actual words that made up that teaching. There is no Sermon on the Mount nor long Prayer at the Last Supper in Mark.
 - Instead Mark focuses on the actions of Jesus: healing a man with an unclean spirit, healing Simon's mother-in-law, curing a leper, and a paralytic, and on and on.
 - For Mark, Jesus' actions are his message.
 - For the Jesus of Mark's gospel, faith is not an abstract exercise by which one argues about the niceties of God's law and uncovers the secrets of the Bible code.
 - The Christian life, for Mark, is not so much concerned with the word, but with the word made flesh who dwells among us.

- ✘ 2. Our actions are Our Message
 - We can often be our own worst Pharisees (myself included)
 - Many times we act as the conservators of the message of Jesus, who want to have a scholarly understanding as rightly informed believers
 - But all these are essentially internal and inward-looking, but I believe God's work is made manifest through our actions
 - ◆ It's easy to say, 'I believe in Jesus as my personal savior,' and then do nothing more with this than saying a quick prayer that God would feed the hungry.
 - + By Mark's gospel, however, we are reminded of our need to be authentic in our faith.
 - ◆ And God's work is to be done in more wide-reaching areas: feed the hungry, console the sorrowful, bless the peacemakers
 - + These kinds of things transform our commitment to our religious faith into a truly authentic and authoritative act
 - I think that the strength of Christ Church in Anacortes, WA is that we don't hold our faith in private, rather, we choose to live it actively within our community.
 - Jesus did many miracles by changing just one person, but by reaching out and restoring that individual's place in the community, Jesus transformed the world....and we have the authority to do the same.