

Epiphany B-4, 2009

Mark 1: 21-28

Feb. 1, 2009

Title: A New Teaching

Grace and peace to you this Epiphany from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, the one who commands even the unclean spirits.

In just a few short weeks 12 new households will seek to bind themselves to us. New members who will stand before this altar, as have we, and commit themselves to a life of believing in Christ, belonging to Christ's family and serving as Christ's family in the world. How about that? They range from as young as 6 months to as old as over 80. They are young adults; they are great grandparents. Twelve households. With only 12 core disciples Jesus formed a movement which would transform the world. Imagine what God in Christ can do with these 12 households. We will be invited to sit down with these brothers and sisters and share our lives with them.....

In just a few short weeks we will engage in the most significant change in our Sunday morning experience—worship and education—since the pioneers of this community moved onto this mission site in 1986. Coinciding with the beginning of Lent, we move to two worship times, with two distinct worship styles; Smack dab in the middle of this sea change is a huge opportunity for each of us---a dedicated time for faith formation and fellowship. Jesus called his first disciples out of the boat, a boat they surely knew from stem to stern, in seas they regularly and reliably sailed year after year. And they left their boats by the invitation of Jesus. We are being invited to leap into uncharted wates and ride together toward renewed faith, refreshed worship, rewarding fellowship.

In just a few short weeks the Serving Cup Apartments known as the Green Level Homes will be completed. 12 adults with developmental delays who are capable of living independently, will start there a new life. The leaders of the Serving Cup, a not for profit started by Good Shepherd, heard the need for this kind of housing back in 2001, 8 years

ago. They faced numerous hurdles, some as seemedly high as Mt. Everest. Had they given up and certainly could have those 12 adults would still be languishing with dreams deferred. But now a door is opened, a pathway is given and they come charging through. It's as though Jesus is silencing the demons of isolation and exclusion. We will be invited to step into the lives of these as yet unknown people, to be a support team, advocates for their growth and ours.

12 new households; a new Sunday morning schedule; 6 apartments for 12 adults with developmental delays...in just a few short weeks.

How ironic that today is the 26th anniversary of our very first worship service. On Feb. 4, 1983, 93 brave souls inspite of a dusting of snow came to La Petite Day Care and began the praise of God known as Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. And how amazing it is that on this very anniversary, a day of firsts, we encounter Jesus at his very first worship service engaging in his first act of ministry.

In 8 lightening quick verses we are given an Epiphany—Jesus is revealed to us as the one who teaches with authority, who calls out and silences the unclean spirits. Mark wants us to know that the whole world depends on Jesus. So that from the first encounter we behold that authority is in this particular life, Jesus, who is the very content of his teaching.

Jesus doesn't appease or accommodate; he casts out. The demons know who Jesus is. He silences them and they obey. They are powerless before Jesus. They don't stand a chance. This is not a coin toss to see who gets the ball; they are marshaled out of the stadium.

This is not a negotiated peace settlement so we can go on hating each other. This is the demonic power of hatred shot out of our universe.

This is not 150 people drowning in the Hudson; it's the plane landing safely.

This is not a salmonella spreading peanut factory; this is the illness banished so that fear doesn't destroy.

This is not a small shovel seeking to move a mountain of snow; this is the bright sun's heat melting that whole mountain. So that the demon of resignation which can have so much power is cast out.

This is who Jesus is. What he says goes: "The unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice, came out of him."

That's the teaching, demonstrated, enacted. Jesus wins...he brings life and freedom and new beginning. He's serious about it. Serious to the point of giving his own life. He has our best interest at heart...in that synagogue in Capernaum and in this one in Raleigh, on the corner of Creedmoor and Sawmill Roads.

"Be silent and come out."

What authority does this word of Jesus have in you? What kind of demon is misshaping you, preventing you from becoming who God in Christ intends? What teaching has more power? Jesus? Or some voice that keeps you in bondage?

Last Sunday Sally and I worshipped with our son Peter at Faith Lutheran Church in Cambridge. In Pastor Tim Stein's message on the power of words he told the story of being at a social event where someone asked what part of Cambridge he lived in. Pastor Stein said he lived in East Cambridge. Evidently, in that town East Cambridge is on the wrong side of the tracks. This person immediately began to back away as he lived in West Cambridge. Oh the power of a word to shape us, to capture our hearts and wills. Building assumptions about ourselves and others.

So you live in Southeast Raleigh

So you are unemployed

So you prefer traditional worship

So you speak only Spanish

So you dropped out of college

So you are a Republican or a Democrat

So you live in a 4000 square foot house...and on and on.

These may not be demons we must cast out. They surely can have power over us and bind us, having authority in shaping us.

Today written reports about our life in Christ in 2008 are available in our Narthex. Words, lots of words. But more importantly they tell our story. They offer a sense of who we are as God's people called together in this church, under the authority of Jesus.

Mark gives us crisp, direct words about Jesus....so you can't miss who he is. Casts out a demon in the church. Not stopping there—healing a sick women. Not stopping there---curing a person cast out by leprosy. He doesn't stop.....His teaching breeds restoration, births new starts, beckons inclusion. Nothing stops him

In just a few short weeks in this synagogue 12 new households beckoned by Christ into our lives

In just a few short weeks in this synagogue a new Sunday schedule is birthed

In just a few short weeks new life is breed for 12 outsiders in the Serving Cup Green Level Homes.

“What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.”

Amen.

