

Delivered on January 31, 2021 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor.

Imagine with me for a moment, that you are Peter or Andrew, James or John in this story. You see, this story picks up right where we left off in last week’s reading, and these four disciples are now following their new rabbi. In fact, we will learn from next week’s passage, that they not only followed Jesus, but brought him home with them. They took their new teacher to where they lived in Capernaum.

Archaeologists have found a first Century synagogue in Capernaum, and since a town of 1,500 people likely did not have more than one synagogue, it is believed that this is the very place where what we read today happened. Now, imagine you are one of the disciples and you go in your synagogue, like your church. You bring your new teacher in to show him off to your ‘church.’ And he does not disappoint, he is preaching up a storm and teaching, and the people comment on his authority. He wasn’t like the scribes who taught there, who shared teachings and insights from a text and from others, kind of like I’m doing right now.

No, this Jesus preaches and teaches with authority, from out of his very being. You are probably feeling pretty good about yourself right now – Your friends and neighbors love your guy. But then something happens, one of the locals who was there with you. He starts in, ranting about Jesus, bothered by him being there. The man suddenly does not seem to be fully himself anymore. Maybe you knew the man, and he seemed odd sometimes, but you had never seen anything quite like this. Where was this coming from? Was this new? Had this been inside this man before? Now, he’s messing everything up.

How often have we found ourselves in situations like this? Elated that we are perhaps rising in esteem with those whose esteem we care about, and then embarrassed because something went wrong. Times when everything was going right to make us look good, but then it gets ruined. I can imagine the new disciples of Jesus may have felt this way in this moment. Here they were – finally about to be someone in their hometown – and this happens. This impressive teacher with authority greater than the scribes, had chosen each of them, four mere fishers, to be his students. They were moving up in the world, getting respect. Now this man was ruining this moment for them.

But for Jesus, this is an opportunity to show that his authority is not measured by opinions of the crowd, by what the people in the crowd think of him, but it comes from who he truly is. And this man who comes at him, well, this man knows who he is also. He asks, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?’

I want to slow this down, because the speed at which Mark writes makes this exchange quick, but imagine now, that the man’s comments are gradual, chirping out from the crowd, ‘What are you doing here Jesus? You’re from Nazareth!’ You see, this is in a synagogue in Capernaum and

Nazareth is some 20 miles west, away from the lake. Imagine, for a moment someone from Absecon by the ocean saying to a preacher from the inland town of Hammonton, 'What have you to do with us? Preacher from Hammonton?' At first, this exchange sounds like it could be a 'You're not from around here' moment. Imagine you, a disciple, now realizing your moment has passed. Jesus won't bring you respect. They see him as an outsider. You think, 'I was supposed to be someone, but that's gone now.'

But then the next question comes, 'Have you come to destroy us?' That's a big claim to levy against a preacher. But this is the first of four exorcisms in Mark, who shows Jesus engaged in spiritual warfare, more so than any other gospel writer, perhaps to show that the crucified King Jesus, while unlike any earthly King, was still engaged in Kingly actions of battle and conquering. Except the battle is against the spiritual and demonic forces of the age, every age, and the conquering that Jesus is doing is over these forces, and over their only powers – sin and death.

So, here in this passage, the demon appears to speak for all its kind, knowing what is to come. The demon knows a lot actually. In fact, the next line from the demon is just that: 'I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' The demon identifies Jesus. The word for 'know' here is one that means, 'recognize' or 'see.' Common in the practices of exorcisms at the time was to name the demon, because if you name it correctly, you have control over it. And it's almost as if the demon tries to do that to Jesus. The demon tries to name who Jesus is, his identity, to try to claim authority over him.

But Jesus does not need to name the demon and give it an identity, Jesus just rebukes it. Jesus has authority because Jesus is 'the Holy One of God' a rare term in scripture. It is used only three times –in Mark and Luke for this same story, and also, in John's gospel where the Apostles confess this about Jesus after everyone has left, but they say, 'where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.' The demon knows who Jesus is – knows he is the incarnate God – and still the demon defies him, tries to exert power over him. The demon has knowledge of who Jesus truly is, but still remains unfaithful, resistant, rebellious.

Friends, the historic faith of the church has always been centered on proclaiming the gospel, that is to say, centered on proclaiming the gospel. It is centered on proclaiming who Jesus is, and what that means for us, as in, what his work, his life, his saving death on the cross, and his resurrection, have all done in this world to establish God's reign on this earth, and usher in the new creation where heaven and earth will be one, and all things will be restored here on earth for eternity.

This proclamation is what you hear every week about God loving you and humanity so much, that the God of Israel shared in our humanity by the Word becoming fully human, to be the meeting place of heaven and earth in Jesus, to live as we live, and then to die betrayed on a

Roman cross. He took on the world's powers of sin and death, taking our sin to that cross with him and defeating death itself, for he rose again to new life, his body raised and restored. This love has made us clean, worthy of God's Spirit in and among us. And so, by this life, death and resurrection of the true temple, we are like temples, with the Holy Spirit sent to pour God's love in our hearts and bind us together, to be a people called out by God, changed by God's love. We are to be the Church and make a proclamation of this truth by our words and how we live, reflecting our Lord Jesus, who is the true image of God, into a world that is broken and in need of redemption. This gives us the opportunity to participate in Christ, in the reconciliation of all things to our God.

To make this proclamation make any sense though, we must move beyond knowledge. It's not about knowing Jesus or saying a special prayer and feeling like we're special for God, just so that we can punch our ticket and go to heaven when we die. This proclamation is meant to do much more than that. You see the demon 'knew' who Jesus was. The letter of James says demons 'believe' or literally in the Greek, 'have faith' that there is one God, but they don't act like it.

Friends, the new disciples were likely very happy to see their reputation boosted, when they brought their new teacher to their synagogue to preach in their town. Yet, even as great as they were, being the first disciples and as apostles sent out to proclaim the good news of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, ultimately, they are not the story and neither are we as individuals. Jesus is the holy one of God and to help others see this, we are called to be a church that must move past our own knowledge of Jesus and live the faith through our words and our actions.

Today, we have the ordination and installation of officers of the church. These women and men have stepped up to do more by sharing in leadership. But activity in the church is not limited to those who accept a leadership role. The church is not the building, the Sunday service, or even the pastor you have. The church is each of you, the people called out by God.

You will hear in the charges today, that I will refer again to Ephesians 4, a text we used a few weeks ago about living into the calling to which we are called. Indeed, to move past mere knowledge and not be like demons who know there is One God, we must live into our calling with gentleness, humility and patience, bearing with one another in love, with the Spirit in a bond of peace.

And then we must answer the call to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves. That will lead us, as Paul said, to put others ahead of our own interests, and put on the mind of Christ, of our Lord. We are to repent, or 'change our mind' to the mind of Christ, who even though He is equal to God – equal to the Father and Spirit – emptied himself in love for us, so we might in his name glorify him.

This is the humility of our God, the humility we are called to share, as we go out into the world proclaiming this incredibly good news by word and deed. We are to glorify the God we serve, by loving God and serving one another.

Let us move beyond mere knowledge, for as Paul says in a lectionary reading from 1 Corinthians that we did not read today, knowledge only 'puffs us up.' Love is the key to all that we do. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not boast. Knowledge isn't patient all the time. It's not always kind. And when we know things, we often like to boast.

Love lets us move beyond knowledge and live life to the fullest now, by putting others needs ahead of our own, filled by the Spirit to proclaim the good news that our God, who did not need to save us, put our needs first, to live as we live, die on the cross, and rising to new life, for us to live abundantly now, and eternally, forever. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

Mark 1: 21-28 (NRSV) They went to ***Capernaum***; and when the ***sabbath*** came, he ***entered*** the ***synagogue*** and taught. They were ***astounded*** at his teaching, for he ***taught*** them as one having ***authority***, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a ***man*** with an unclean ***spirit***, and he ***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***." But Jesus ***rebuked*** him, saying, "Be ***silent***, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, ***convulsing*** him and ***crying*** with a ***loud voice***, came out of him. They were all ***amazed***, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new ***teaching***—with authority! He commands even the ***unclean*** spirits, and they ***obey*** him." At once his ***fame began*** to ***spread*** throughout the ***surrounding*** ***region*** of ***Galilee***.