

## **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time January 28, 2018**

On the Sundays of Ordinary Time this year, we are hearing mostly from the Gospel of Mark. It is the shortest of the 4 Gospels and so moves along at a very fast pace.

Mark omits entirely the birth of our Lord. He begins with the prophetic words of John the Baptist, then the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, then the accounts of Jesus being tempted by the devil, beginning his public ministry, and calling his first disciples.

All of this before we are even half way through Chapter 1!

This week Jesus is already teaching and healing in the synagogue in Capernaum.

The selection we hear today includes a question put directly to Jesus while he is in the synagogue: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

You might say this is the core question of the Gospel: “What have you to do with us (or what have you to do with me), Jesus of Nazareth?”

Strange perhaps, this question comes from the mouth of an unclean spirit. To make matters worse, the demon got everything else right, by calling Jesus the Holy One of God, and accusing him of having come to destroy evil spirits.

Maybe the unclean spirit knew he was defeated; the jig was up. The Holy One of God was here, and He was stronger than all the demons. Divine love would win out after all.

The two ideas that Mark emphasizes in this passage, are that Jesus was a teacher, and that he exercised authority.

If we ask what it was that Jesus taught, Mark doesn't give us much.

Until now and for some time to come, we will hear only 19 words of Jesus' actual teaching; those words were in last week's Gospel: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus astounded the people because he didn't just talk about God, he made God's love tangible. He was the very Word of God and the power of God. There is no other explanation for why some people simply dropped everything to follow him.

Jesus does not exercise an authority which seeks to dominate and control others. His teaching is in the Spirit of grace, forgiveness, healing, and acceptance.

The authority of Jesus does not appeal to fear but to that force that drives out all fear – unbounded love.

"What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth?"

Are you another prophet and lawgiver like Moses? We heard Moses in our First Reading, promise a continuity of the prophetic tradition in Israel.

Prophets, and there will be many of them, chosen by God throughout the history of Israel. They will often be lonely voices challenging accepted practices and ways of thinking.

What about Jesus? Just another prophet, or are you so much more – The Messiah – Our Savior – My Savior – the true fulfillment of all the prophets and all the laws?

Where are you Jesus, in the priorities of my life? Are you the most important person in my life?

St Paul in our Second Reading is writing to the early Christians about priorities. He believed, as did his audience, that time was short, that the end of the world was near. Thus, his advice about the single life versus the married life. If the world is going to end soon, maybe it's not the best time to plan a wedding reception.

It makes you wonder what your perspective would be if faced with an imminent crisis?

When people faced last summer's hurricanes and floods or the recent fires in California, and had to evacuate, what was most important to do, before leaving?

What did they feel they had to take with them? What did they have to leave behind, because it was less important than what was already filling their car or suitcase?

The most inspiring stories we heard were not about people saving possession's, but rather people who went to check on a neighbor, sometimes a perfect stranger, and seeking to bring them to safety, even at the risk of their own lives.

Are the things we are concerned or anxious about, worthy of the attention we give them, or are they distractions, from what is more life-giving for us, and our world?

What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Well the demons got it right in our story. Sometimes us ordinary people take a while to make up our minds about Jesus.

But eventually we too must answer the question - probably more than once in our lives. We were reminded of that choice in the responsorial psalm - "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Mr. Ron Huntley in our Mission this week, invited us to a true encounter with Jesus – or maybe to encounter him again in a deeper, fuller way. Are we all in, or are we simply curious bystanders?

Do we fully embrace our baptismal call as disciples of the Lord and are we, like those first disciples, willing to make Jesus the center of our life?

Even those disciples who left everything behind had a long road ahead of them before they would understand just what Jesus of Nazareth, would do with them.

Are we ready to believe, to heed the word of God, and to live as women and men of the Good News in our world?

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

While those gawking bystanders in the synagogue didn't make any commitments after seeing and hearing Jesus, they do allow themselves to be curious. That is a good beginning.

I bet we all know someone that is curious. Invite them or yourself, to experience Alpha if you have not been through that program.

Or if you have done Alpha, then sign up to participate in one of our discipleship groups. More information is in the bulletin and in the narthex.

Maybe this week spend some time remembering the moments when you felt his invitation and wanted to give Him your all. What diverted you? What took you in a different direction?

I think we have already heard the answer to the demon's frightened "What have you to do with us?"

It is the only teaching we have heard from Jesus at this point in Mark's Gospel. We heard the words last week. Jesus is making us an offer that we must choose to accept or refuse: "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."