

*“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.”*

*“Jesus and his disciples 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.”*

Mark's gospel moves pretty fast. The past two weeks we read of people being called by Jesus to become his disciples, fishers of people. Today we are still in the first chapter and the mission has already begun in earnest. In today's first reading from Deuteronomy we hear the words of Moses foretelling the arrival of a prophet, one who will be one of their own and who will speak everything that God commands and in today's gospel from Mark, we hear that not only has Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum and begun to teach, but that he has done so with authority. We have the benefit of hindsight at this point and can readily see what is occurring. Jesus is the fulfillment of the words spoken to Moses and that his authority comes from the fact that he is speaking that which God commands. But for the folks who have gathered around to hear this young man who speaks in a direct and uncomplicated manner, well they are a bit perplexed. After all the chief priests and scribes, those who traditionally are the one's teaching in the synagogue, they are more likely to engage in a questioning sort of dialogue, looking at many sides of issues, referring to many sets of rules and customs answering questions with more questions. Jesus on the other hand, comes into the midst of those gathered in the synagogue delivering a message that seemingly derives its authority from its forthright simplicity. Talking in parables with examples that the people could relate to, Jesus provides straightforward instructions on how to bring forth the kingdom of God here on earth. No one wonder everyone in the synagogue was affected by his presence, some more loudly than others, but will get to that part later on. Let's concentrate on the teaching itself for the moment. Because it wasn't just the words that were different, it was who he was speaking to, who had been allowed to gather around him and listen to his message. Jesus made a point of reaching out

to those who society had marginalized. The poor, the outcast, those deemed to be sinners or worse tax collectors, all these were the people that Jesus included in his message of love and justice. Love your neighbor, all your neighbors, not just the ones who already know and like you, be careful not to act as judge that is a position reserved only for God, take care of each other, respect each other, and celebrate that which brings you together as well as that which makes you different. Love God, love each other. Pretty simple. Those are the teachings that we as baptized members of the body of Christ live by too. After all they are the teachings that we promise to uphold each time we renew our baptismal covenant. Those simple teachings that should be so easy to live by and yet somehow can get lost in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives in the world beyond the doors of this church. Love God; love one another, spoken that morning in the synagogue with authority and to the amazement of everyone who was there to hear it. Well, almost everyone.

And that brings us to the man and the unclean spirit. He comes forward and begins to question Jesus with a sort of “who do you think that you are?” Or a “how dare you!” And then he utters the strangest thing “I know who you are, the Holy One of God!” So even the middle of what is referred to as a demonic outburst, the truth of Jesus and his mission comes forth. And once again everyone who witnesses this is amazed by what has taken place. It is a nifty ending to the reading, I suppose, but one that really has little implication to us, here in 2012, right? I think that the man with the unclean spirit, the one that even though he knows who Jesus is, is not able to follow his teachings, has more in common with us than we may care to admit. A few minutes ago I said that the teachings of Christ were simple and yet not always easy to follow. We do try and know that, but in truth we are all in possession of demons, for lack of a better word, that grab hold us and prevent us from living fully into our calling as Christians. They are as varied and different as we are, and yet they all have at one time or another possessed the power to hold us back. The man cries out “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” And then he reveals Jesus identity. Jesus deals with the unclean spirit, quite handily, just saying the words “be quiet and come out of him.” It was that simple. We, like the man with the unclean spirit know full well who Jesus is, and that is in fact the good news of this gospel reading.

Although the teachings of Jesus, that day and throughout his ministry were simple, direct and uncomplicated to hear, they remain at times very difficult to follow. We gather each week in community and fellowship to be fed, nourished and strengthened to leave this place and follow the word and example of Christ in the world. And sometimes it is easier to do than other times. Sometimes, even though we know who Jesus is, The Holy One of God, demons such as fear, doubt, confusion, lack of self confidence to name but a few, get in the middle of things and prevent us from doing “the work we have been given to do.” It is at those times, we need to remember that we are never alone. Even when things may seem too hard to accomplish, too dark to go on, too complicated to solve, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit dances and weaves in and around us, supporting us on the journey and that Jesus is always there to relieve of the demon that stands in our way. The events in the synagogue that day, from the authoritative teachings of Jesus to the banishing of the unclean spirit left all who were witnesses amazed, and Mark tells us that from that time on Jesus’ fame began to spread. We too, through our faith, and our promise to live into and follow the teachings of Jesus have the responsibility to keep spreading the good news of God in Christ. The way may not always be smooth, we may from time to time find ourselves temporarily blocked by demons of our own making, but with Christ and in Christ and with the power of the Holy Spirit we can and will go forth into the world seeking and serving Christ in all that we meet.