

## A new authority illicit and new response

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time January 28 2018

Let me give you a bit of liturgical trivia. On Sunday we have a three year cycle of readings.  
Its fairly simple. In year A we read from Matthew's Gospel.  
In year B we read from Mark's gospel, and in Year C we red from Luke's gospel.  
John gospel is interspersed in the three year cycle, in various places.  
2018 is year B and we are for the most part we will be reading from Mark's gospel.  
Now keep in mind that Mark's gospel was the first gospel written, and it is the shortest gospel.  
Mark has no template, so he has to make every word count.

So let me give you a quick synopsis of the beginning of Mark's gospel.  
John the Baptist appears on the scene, Jesus is baptized, he is tempted in the desert.  
Jesus calls people to repent and believe the Good News.  
He calls the first four disciples (pause) and then he goes to the synagogue to preach.  
Mark has just given his readers a summary of Jesus chronology.  
But he has yet to explain who this Jesus character is.

Now I want you to think back about 2 ½ years.  
The Bishop's letter of appoints has just come out.  
I have just been named the new pastor of St. Mark,  
and although many of you may have heard of me, or even met me at some diocesan function,  
you were still asking yourself, "Who is this Fr. Jim Kaptein character?"  
This is the question that Mark is addressing, "Who is this Jesus character?"

Now Mark answers this question in a very unusual way.  
By the casting out of the demon in the gospel that was just read.  
To understand how Mark introduces Jesus, you need to understand the demons position.  
In ancient times purity was paramount.  
If you became impure in any way, there was a long convoluted way in which you became pure again,  
and to avoid the long convoluted process,  
you did everything you could to avoid becoming impure.  
This was the teaching of the scribes, and the unclean spirit knew it.  
So for the most part, unclean spirits who possessed people were safe.  
But the unclean spirit, in the gospel, also sensed something different in Jesus.  
So it asks a question. 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?'  
meaning 'it is customary to leave us alone and to let us torment those we inhabit.  
To do anything else is to become impure yourself.  
(pause) You are not thinking of anything else are you?'  
The second questions intuits the answer to the first question. "Have you come to destroy us?"

The unclean spirit is thinking. "Are you seriously considering polluting yourself?  
Do you think you can destroy us without being drawn into our uncleanliness?  
It is unthinkable that God's holy one would risk defilement."  
The unclean spirit has made his case. He believes anyone who prizes holiness will surely stay away.

But Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, sees things differently.  
He is in no way concerned with being pure or unpure,  
his only concern is doing the will of his father in heaven.  
So he proclaims, "Be silent and come out of him."

Convulsing and screaming, the unclean spirit leaves the man.

It does not go willingly.

It has not been argued into submission.

On the contrary it has not just met its match, it has met a higher authority,  
the Son of God, and that higher authority has to be obeyed.

That is that with the unclean spirit.

(pause) But what about the rest of the people in the synagogue.

They are amazed because they have seen another way to deal with impurity.

They are seeing something new.

The old way of dealing with impurity...contact with an unclean spirit...was avoidance...

the new way of dealing with an unclean spirit was casting him out by the power of God.

Mark is basically saying,

“There is a new sheriff in town...and the old ways of dealing with things is going to change.”

Love, not fear, is going to be the new standard.

Now to us hearing this, it is old news.

But remember we have 2000 years of tradition that we are following.

The people at the time of Jesus had never heard of anything like this.

This was new, revolutionary, and most of all freeing...

no longer were they bound by the fear of the scribes and Pharisees,

they have been set free by the power of God.

Now think about this.

If you were a farmer who witnessed this, and when you went home that night,

your spouse asked you, “Did anything different happened at the synagogue happened that day?”

You would have a lot to say, and it would not end there.

The authority that Jesus was promulgating would become the talk of the town.

It is no wonder his fame spread throughout the area.

Now I need to say a few things: One, this power and authority did not end with Jesus’ death.

Jesus bequeathed his power and authority to his apostles at Pentecost,

and that power and authority has permeated through he ages,

we here today are the recipients of this power and authority.

In a few minutes I will say, “This is my body.”

If you think that power stems from me...I have land I want to sell you.

Every time I celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation I say, “I absolve you of all your sins.”

Again, the power of God...not the power of Jim.

At confirmation the Bishop says, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The power of God...not the power of the Bishop.

The list is endless. Every time we invoke the power of God,

we are invoking the power of God and not the power of the one doing the invocation.

But I also need to say, it is very clear in the gospel,

that those who were in the synagogue were the ones who went out and proclaimed the Good News.

This became even more evident after the death and resurrection.

The disciples were commanded, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

We sometimes think that this command was given only to the eleven who stood at the foot of the mountain.

But as we all know the Word of God is not a single utterance, spoken once, heard once,  
and then passed on by tradition.

As long as creation exists, God is breathing his power and authority into all things,  
including into all people.

The eleven at the foot of the mountain do not hold a monopoly on the power and authority of God.

This power and authority is given to us at Baptism,  
sealed in us at Confirmation and renewed in us every time we receive the Eucharist.

We can never forget the last part of Jesus command.

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Just as those who left the synagogue 2000 years ago,  
proclaimed the power and authority of God to all in the region.

We are called to proclaim the power and authority to God to all the people that we meet.

This is what it means to be an intentional disciple.

We need to intentionally spread the Good News,  
so the fame of Jesus is spread throughout the Prince Albert area.

(pause) And remember...this is only the beginning of Mark's gospel.