

March 14, 2021 The Way Pt. 3 Mark 1:21-27

Dearly Beloved;

I am reporting to you this morning that our first in-person worship event on March 7th went well. Twenty six, people were present and took communion, using the pods, we purchased, and used just before we went into lockdown. Everyone who attended was logged in on arrival, sat in family pods or 6 feet apart, wore masks, and we did not sing the words to praise selections. Sherry provided music, and we were all in agreement, in our enjoyment of the music she brought us. Shortened hymns, and short communion liturgy meant that we were on our way out of the sanctuary in 40 minutes. For the next while the services should be approximately 30 minutes in length. Remember that the problem we face, meeting in doors, is that we share the air supply. That is how Covid-19 and its variants spread.

I can also report to you that we have a sufficient supply of the communion pods for a Maundy Thursday service on April 1st. This will be an evening service. This year it will take place in the sanctuary because that will allow us to socially distance. That service will be a half hour in length. A brief meditation will replace the sermon. The focus will be the communion celebration which Jesus gave the 12 disciples on the Thursday night of what we now call Holy Week. There will be no Good Friday Service. As long as we are able to do in-person worship Easter will be celebrated in the Sanctuary. If a third wave of Covid-19 cancels these plans we will be able to do communion via the format of The Sermon From The Dining

Room Table. The Sermon manuscript will continue to be available on our web site as will the link to the video that Barbara and I have been providing.

Should you read this on Saturday when it goes up on the web site, I remind you that this is the Weekend when we advance our clocks by one hour, and go into Daylight Saving Time. Please stay safe. I and our Session will be doing what we can to provide the safest possible options for your worship experience.

The Way Part 3 Mark 1:21-27

Jesus defined HIMSELF, and John wrote it down for us, as “the way, the truth and the life.” HE said, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) My Lenten services, based on texts from Mark’s Gospel are a commentary on that text from John’s Gospel. Even those who opposed Jesus said to HIM, “Teacher we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.” (Luke 20:21) As a direct result of these realities, Jesus and his band of followers, numbering close to 120 became known as followers of the way. That is who we are, in 2021, as the world endeavors to survive the pandemic of Covid-19 and its variants.

Jesus spent the balance of his 3 years of ministry in the region of Galilee. He walked from town to town and village to village. In Mark 1 beginning at verse 21, HE and his followers go to Capernaum. And because it was Sabbath, our Saturday,

according to the Jewish customs Jesus went to the synagogue and he began to teach. What that means is that Jesus did the sermon on that day. He taught from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is interesting to read the reviews HE got on that particular day.

“The people were amazed at HIS teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” Apparently Jesus was a gifted communicator. HIS message was not “boring.” No one went to sleep. They listened with wrapped attention. It was not an impersonal lecture. HE was speaking from the heart. HE engaged HIS audience because HE was talking about life in the real world, their world. HE affected them.

There was a man present in the gathering who was known to be possessed of an evil spirit. And he disrupted the gathering, by crying out loudly. “What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are...the Holy One of God.” Not only was he disrupting the meeting, his identification of who Jesus is, is remarkable.

First of all, this possessed man identified Jesus by name. He knew where Jesus was from. He identifies Jesus in terms of HIS humanity. He names him, Jesus. And specifically he is Jesus from that bywater of Nazareth.

Secondly, he cries out expressing the fears of the evil spirit that is in him. Have you come to destroy us? His

recognition of Jesus, is a cry of fear on behalf of the evil spirit, that it is about to meet its match, and lose the control it has over its victim. This is not your everyday, normal conversation. There is recognition here that life is a battlefield between good and evil. And the evil spirit that holds sway in this man's life is fearful it is about to be evicted.

Thirdly, the possessed man identifies exactly who Jesus is. "You are the Holy One of God!" The evil spirit has discerned and discloses that it recognizes Jesus is the promised Messiah. And if it is true, the evil spirit knows it is in trouble. It means Jesus is the Sheriff who can set the man free of the evil that binds him.

That authority that the gathering has noted in Jesus' teaching is immediately obvious. Jesus takes charge of the situation. HE commands the spirit to be silent. He commands the spirit to come out of the man. It obeyed Jesus. In doing so it caused the man to shake violently and when it came out of the man, it made him shriek. Clearly the image is that there is pain for the man in his being set free. Clearly the spirit tries to hang on to its host with its claws and its fingernails. But it has recognized who Jesus is. It has no alternative but to obey HIM.

At that point Mark, telling us what Peter witnessed, turns to focus on those who were there to see this power encounter between Jesus and the evil spirit. People turn to one another and are asking, what is this? Amazement

abounds. The authority of Jesus is not simply that he is a great teacher. In an encounter with evil, Jesus can force evil spirits to obey HIM. He sets the man free of his addiction; HE breaks the chains that bind us to darkness and its ways. And the editorial comment of Mark-Peter, is that word spread throughout Galilee, that Jesus is singular, and special, with the power to deliver people who are in bondage.

Living in the 21st century we have problems taking evil spirits and demons seriously. On the other hand, so much of our entertainment, books, movies and television shows are based on the fundamental struggle between good and evil, and the difficulty the average person has to overcome the powers that besiege us, and even possess us in a life of darkness and pain.

In February of 2015, I stood in the ruins of that synagogue in Capernaum. The place was real, and is visited by most of the pilgrims who visit Israel. I could not help but think, "this is the place where it became obvious to numbers of people, that Jesus is the way to new life, and healthy life, life characterized by light, and love for one's neighbours." That power encounter with evil, is a piece and a part of Jesus ministry, way back then, and even now. Jesus sets people free. He breaks the bondage we are prone to with evil and darkness. And the best publicity that HIS kingdom can receive, is that people tell their stories, the difference that Jesus has made in their life, in their family, in their community. The world and our nation not only needs us to be agents of light, it wants to hear

from us that there is hope in a time of darkness. A time of pain. A time when thousands, millions have died from sickness that has swept round the globe.

The word that spread throughout Galilee was not a myth. It was a real person's testimony, that in a dark and pain ridden world, Jesus is the way of hope and deliverance.

Let us pray;

Lord free us from the things that bind us and hold us back from serving others, serving our community, meeting some of the needs of our neighbours. Grant us the authority to be agents of peace and of mercy, protecting those who do not have power. Helping those who need help. Make us agents of the way, in Jesus name. Amen