

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – Lectionary 4

8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, January 29, 2012

Vicar Peter J. Roy

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Mark 1: 21-28

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight. Lord you are our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN

My younger son Casey, who is in kindergarten, is learning to read. It is really interesting to be able to witness a child learning to read. His reading began with small simple words, such as; it, and, the, day, they, play, like, and Love. In addition to his thirty or so sight words he is able to use the context of

pictures in the books he is given by his teacher to help identify more advanced words in his readings. With the help of pictures in the book Casey is able to read; ***"The Sky is Falling."*** This book was about how a bunch of woodland creatures share the news of the sky is falling based on the fact something had hit the head of a rabbit. Casey was able to identify, based on the picture clues on the pages, words like; rabbit, bear, and squirrel. He was able to read to me how the Wise Old Owl taught them that it was just a nut that fell from the tree

Casey's reading exercise got me thinking about how we identify things in our lives. How often we rely on visual clues to make identifications. Like the woodland creatures in Casey's book, we often rely on what we see to help identify things and people. I have found this to be true in my life. In middle

school the large canvas bag that had "THE TARRYTOWN DAILY NEWS" on it, filled with newspapers, that I carried as I rode my bicycle after school pegged me as the "Newspaper Boy". Some years later the fire helmet and turnout gear at a fire scene was a dead giveaway that I was firefighter. Sometimes it was not so easy, while working at the bank I would often be called upon to respond to medical emergencies for my hometown volunteer ambulance squad. A stethoscope around my neck when getting out of an ambulance was a pretty good sign that I was an E.M.T., but put me in an emergency room when I was wearing a dress shirt, slacks and tie, I was often mistaken for a doctor, since I responded from my office at the bank. I guess I should have worn my W2 income statement of a volunteer E.M.T. around my neck as Identification.

Now if you have seen me during certain weeks in the summer in central Florida, I am guessing that most of you would be able to identify the six foot-four guy wearing mouse ears, a mickey shirt, shorts, and sunglasses as either a tourist, or a member of the Brock or Ludwig family. But with one particular shirt I wear I have been miss-identified as a Disney Cast member on a number of occasions, much to my oldest son, Camden's delight.

Then of course there is my outfit today; the Alb, the Clerical Shirt, and the Collar. While the title of "Vicar" might not come to mind immediately to people outside of Trinity, to many my identity as pastoral presence is often a given in today's culture. So, often we can make identifications by what we see. Police officers in uniforms, pro athletes in their

jerseys, there are many identifications we can make without really thinking about them.

Then of course there are identifications we make based upon our previous knowledge of who a particular person is in our society. I was thinking about this earlier this week when I watched the President's State of the Union Address. There is something I always find comical about the State of the Union speech regardless of who is the current holding the office of President. I find it rather funny when the Sargent of Arms of the House of Representatives announces; "Mister (or Madam) Speaker, the President of the United States!" Our Presidents have been doing these speeches for over 200 years now; you would think that most people in the room would already know who they were coming to hear deliver the speech? Yet, sometimes

it helps if someone, like the Wise Old Owl in Casey's book, or even someone we least expect, to tell us what we are about to be witness.

How easy is it to identify an authority? Our gospel passage today is Mark's version of Jesus Christ's beginning of his public ministry. What I like about Mark's Gospel is how fast things happen. The writer of Mark really does not waste much time in telling the story of Jesus and his ministry. Our passage today is at verse 21 in the first chapter, and for a recap we have: Jesus baptized by John the Baptist and heavens torn open with the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, he has gone into the wilderness for 40 days being tempted and tested by Satan. At verse 12 Jesus returns from the wilderness and begins calling the first of his disciples. Now just

21 verses, roughly 9 paragraphs we come to today's lesson.

Our Gospel passage opens with; "Then they went to Capernaum." The assumption is the "they" Mark is referring to is Jesus and his first called disciples; Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John. Jesus had just "called" these fishermen to follow him and this is Mark's next installment in his Gospel. So we have Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum and Mark writes that Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. A synagogue is different than a Temple at this time. A synagogue was a religious institution, a place for learning and studies the scriptures. A synagogue could be established in an area which had at least ten married Jewish men. This first public display is

made in a simple community gathering space, where Jesus begins his role as a teacher.

There is no mention if Jesus was asked to teach, or if he was invited to speak. In fact the way Mark presents it in his Gospel is that Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. Eugene Peterson in his translation puts it this way: "Jesus lost no time in getting to the meeting place. He spent the day there teaching". (Mark 1:21 "The Message")

Jesus first public act of ministry is teaching, and it was teaching in a new and refreshingly different way than had been done in the synagogue before. "Jesus was not just quibbling and quoting scriptures like the religion scholars", he was bringing the words to life, teaching with confidence.

Mark writes that the people in the synagogue said that he taught with authority. Jesus's identity as an authority was not coming from something visual. There is no mention of any special clothing, or amazing, brilliant white light in this story. No it was not visual, his authority was coming from his teaching; his ability to perform an action.

Jesus spoke to those who gathered with an amazing, charismatic, power. Jesus was taking the words from the scrolls and giving them a new voice. Jesus was taking God's words and freeing them from the pages and sharing them with the community willing to be embraced with the scriptures. Unlike the scribes who would read and just repeat the writings of the ancient scriptures, Jesus brought the words to life and gave the words a new meaning.

Jesus's teaching is the beginning of his ministry, but his identity is revealed in a different way.

Our passage continues with Jesus being interrupted by a man who was disturbed and yelling. "What do you want with us Jesus?!?!?" This troubled man, with a disturbed soul is the one who identifies Jesus, first by name, "Jesus", and later as; "...you are the Holy One of God!" The disciples had not made this connection. They became willing followers of Jesus, but had not stated why. The majority of the people in the temple had not made this connection. They acknowledge his authority as a teacher, but nobody had said who this great teacher was in their presence. Yet it is this troubled and disturbed man, who has personal demons, (or evil spirits, as they were called in Jesus' time,) it was this Unclean Man, a man no one in the community would associate

with, this outcast of society who identifies Jesus as The Holy One of God.

Who in our society do we consider unclean, or treat as outcasts? Who do we marginalize for their outside identity or actions? Whose thoughts do we disregard because of their past or current condition? These questions are important, because as this passage in Mark show us, it can be those we least expect who can identify Christ, and recognize the healing powers of his love and grace! It is our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are in the darkest of places, be it; mentally, physically, emotionally, economically, or socially, who can often identify Christ and either embrace his grace, or such as this unclean man may ask; "Have you come to destroy us?!?"

God did not send Jesus to destroy those who are in trouble, but to save and take away the sins of the world. It was with Christ's stern command that this disturbed man was freed from his troubles. Yet we know from this passage it was more than words that Jesus spoke, it was with authority that Christ had in his simple words that gave his words power in his Message. Jesus taught the community with authority, and it is with this authority from God, Our Father, that Jesus is able to heal those who identify Christ as a part of our lives.

The first of Jesus Christ's public ministry passages closes with Mark's sharing of the spreading of the news of Jesus over the region. This is a Gospel story that we should live out in our lives today. We should not be like scribes who just read and repeat what is written, but we should be like Jesus, we

should take the Message and give the words life and meaning in our lives. We should not ignore the outcast and marginalized, but we should recognize that they too can identify the power of Christ in our world. We should be supportive of those in need, and we should assist them as they confront the evil spirits that afflict them in their daily struggles. The power of Holy Spirit is among us as a community of believers, and it is the Power of the Holy Spirit, this Message of God's love for us, his children, that needs to be shared and spread even today.

AMEN.
