

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

January 28, 2024

Nobody Knows Better

Mark 1: 21-28

Today in our Gospel, Mark uses a characteristic word that can mean two things based on its context. This word, you see in the text today, is translated as “*immediately*” every time you see it. And while that is correct, it does also mean straight away or without distraction. And, it really speaks to the power, immediacy, and absolute focus of Jesus as Mark describes Him throughout his gospel account.

So today, we too, without distraction, see our Lord at work and wonder at the curious way He allows Himself to be seen for who He really is.

Have you ever met that person that constantly told you how much they know and how smart they are?

A friend of mine from seminary once had fun with a person just like this, someone that was an undeniable know-it-all on every subject. They were having dinner at Frank Winters’ house. (You all remember Pastor Winter from last week’s sermon who preached that epic line that said, “We better be grateful we don’t get what we deserve!!!”) Yah, same guy!

Well, my friend from Seminary, Bill, was best friends with Pastor Frank Winter’s son, Chip. They were all in town together in Colorado, where the Winters had a big party at their house, and Bill met this classic know-it-all. As he recalled it for me, Chip and he got caught up in a conversation with this lady that knew EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING!

Well, it didn’t take long for Bill and Chip to figure this out. It got so bad, and knowing each other for so long as best friends, they both gave each other that look that reads minds and started to bring up the most random and unknowable topics, just to see how far she would take the rouse! And take it she did! So, after an hour of wind-bagging, she ran out of connections and brought the conversation to a screeching halt because she could only converse if she could prove how smart she was with every subject.

Such is life and such is the experience of the members of the Synagogue who appear to have been relatively unchallenged in their knowledge of God up to this point.

Oh, they could preach Isaiah, they could sing the psalms, they could interpret the Torah, because they knew everything. Until they realized, today, that they were teaching like they read God's Word and knew it and told people what it said. But Jesus, on the other hand, spoke and preached like one who wrote it Himself.

If you have ever been to a book reading where the author read one of your favorite books for you, it's quite the experience. You get to see the person that gave birth to their literary child that they gave to you in book form. Then, they take that child back from you for just a moment; and it's like seeing a baby who was passed around the room from relative to relative, then rejoicing knowing the child was back in their mother's arms. There is just nothing like it, the creator and their creation in perfect harmony.

But I'm not sure they realized that in our lesson today. And the demon possessed man seems to bear that out.

An unclean spirit had taken hold of a man in the synagogue, and this spirit knew the harmony of God and His very Words, and was speaking to the people. And, this spirit was so keenly aware of who Jesus was, his cries of acclamation could not be silenced to the utter horror of all who heard him. You know it's a bad day for your spiritual life when Jesus comes into your presence and an unclean spirit recognizes Him for who He is before you do!

So, let me get you caught up and summarize where we are at this point in the narrative.

1. Jesus arrives, and the know-it-alls, don't appear to know Him at all.
2. The unclean spirit cries out and not only knows Him, but knows what Jesus can do, because of who He is.
3. Jesus, up to this point and pretty much throughout the narrative and the rest of the Gospel, doesn't say who He is.

In fact, interestingly enough, "Jesus never proclaimed that he was the Messiah or the Son of God but let men draw this as a conclusion, and when they drew it, either in hostile or in believing fashion, he substantiated it."

(The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel By R.C.H. Lenski 1956 The Wartburg Press; Columbus Ohio. Page 79.)

Oh, how I love that! The King of the Universe took on the form of a servant, never forcing His adulation, but rather letting people discover it all on their own.

I have seen so many famous people do this very thing.

I know we have all seen the character that gets pulled over by the police, or held at the door at a famous club, or denied entry at a hotel resort; and then the poor security is forced to hear their ugly diatribe that inevitably ends with, “Do you know who I am? I could have your job ended right now.”

Yah, we all love to hate that person.

No, I’m talking about the humble famous people that are way bigger than any of the aforementioned nitwits, and the last thing they would ever do is humiliate the people just trying to do their job. These are the rock stars that aren’t given entrance to the stadium right before the concert starts, because the security didn’t know who they were and the rock star forgot their ID badge. They just smiled and patiently waited for the manager to come and let them in.

These are the famous speakers and political pundits that are told they are in the wrong place on the stage and have to wait in the green room with all the other B list speakers when they know full well they are the main event. Instead of telling someone off, they go back to the room and patiently wait until the stage producer finally finds them and gets the show on the road with their key note address.

These are the movie stars who had a private party reservation, but the hostess doesn’t realize who they are and makes them wait outside until a table is available, like everyone else. And they smile and nod and wait outside, until the manager comes and finds them and puts them in their place of honor.

Almost immediately those poor workers who messed up are threatened with losing their jobs, and the movie star, political pundit, and rock star immediately intervene and say, “It’s fine, they didn’t know. They were just doing their job, let’s give em’ a break.” And your heart melts at their compassion and humility.

Obviously, many of us wish there were more famous people like this. But I say we have all of this we need in Jesus. For even though Isaiah, John the Baptist and even the Eternal Father in Heaven told everyone who Jesus was, Jesus showed the ultimate humility by living with the humble and travelling with the common rabble of every community He went to.

Even though Jesus had the power to destroy this poor man possessed with an unclean spirit, Jesus simply rebuked the spirit and let the people talk about His actions throughout the country.

Even though Jesus should have been at banquet feasts seated with kings and emperors at His feet, He sat on beaches eating fish he caught with His own hands, or in crowds of thousands with barley loaves he broke for them to eat first.

Even though He deserved adulation as God in their midst, He submitted to the whip, the humiliation of carrying His own cross to His own humiliating death, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” He didn’t need to say anything because everyone who knew that He died there for them would have their proof of who He was when He rose from the dead.

We still have our know-it-alls.

They know how to live their life, they know what they want, and how to get it now. They know how to screw up their lives in sin. And they know how to bring as many people as possible right down with them in their ignorant ways. But, until they know Jesus they never really know how ignorant they really are.

We still have our unclean spirits. But until we come into the presence of Jesus, we have no opportunity to be cleansed of that which makes our souls filthy and vile in our eyes.

Above it all, we still have that Man that went and proclaimed His Gospel at that humble little synagogue/church in Capernaum and never asked to be recognized, memorialized, or aggrandized. And that’s because He was saving all that for us.

He took our shame and gave us His fame. He took our sin so that we could be with Him, and redeemed our sinful condition so He would receive our admonition.

And He did it all because NO ONE knows better how to love us forever.

Now may that peace which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.

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