

*Fifth Sunday After Epiphany*  
*February 4, 2024*  
*He Means Everything*  
*Mark 1:29-39*

I don't know how many of you have heard this phrase, but it's a phrase I grew up with, and to the frustration of many, I do tend to abide by it. And the phrase is, "Say what you mean and mean what you say."

Now, it may seem odd to you that people are frustrated by anyone that would say what they mean and mean what they say. But the truth is, most in our culture today simply don't understand that, and it has made me the weird one on many occasions.

You can lay it at the feet of politicians, media, or purveyors of misinformation who have taught us nobody says what they really mean. And, for me especially as a public figure with thousands of public speeches (or sermons as you know it), people like to splice what I say to find a deeper meaning, or even make my words the opposite of what they actually say. You see, we have been trained in the art of believing anything anyone tells us, unless they tell us the truth; as Mark Twain says so eloquently.

I remember many a conversation and meetings, on the record, where people would come back with something entirely different than what I said. That has even led to people telling people what they *think* I would say before I ever said it, and being wholly inconsistent with what I personally believe. Almost none of it was nefarious, so I didn't care when I found out, I simply asked people, "Who told you that? Because I never said that!" That usually solves miscommunication right on the spot.

One time at my former parish, our LWML chapter president wanted to have their own check book and account at the church so they didn't have to go through the treasurer to disburse monies. Well, the council and voters felt that was not necessary as the treasurer always made sure they had an accurate rendering of their funds and readily made funds available when they requested the money. But the president of the LWML chapter didn't like that at all when she found out later having missed the voters meeting. And when she found out, she said to Marcy, my wife, "We can't have our own check book and checking account? Well, Pastor Kappel is not going to like that!"

I always thought that was so funny because Marcy asked me immediately when she got home concerned why I would not voice that opinion at the voters meeting.

I simply replied, “I didn’t voice that opinion because that was not my opinion. I support what the voters wanted and didn’t think they needed a check book or checking account either! I wonder where she got that?”

Sometimes the gossipers don’t think about who they’re gossiping with.

But another time it was much worse. I was working with a woman who was married three times and was interested in being a young couple’s mentor for their marriages.

She actually said she considered herself an expert at marriage because she had been married 3 times.

All I said in reply was, “I think the ones that are successful in marriage are the ones that have stayed together in their first marriage, and that’s the examples we should be looking to.”

She seemed to accept my statement at the time, but apparently went home and told her 3<sup>rd</sup> husband with a different story, after which he called me angrily, berating me for calling his wife a bad mother, a bad wife, and a bad role model for young married couples. That was a lot to take in, but when I told him what I literally said, he calmed down immediately confirming it with her on the other end of the line.

She simply read too much into what I was saying, and took it personally when I was speaking generally about who would be good mentors for young newly married couples. She was actually a fine mother, a fine wife; just not the best example of how to keep your marriage going when she and her previous two husbands failed to do just that.

But that is exactly why I make every effort to say what I mean and mean what I say. That’s why my sermons are carefully edited, full manuscripts, with documentation when necessary. That’s why I record my sermons so anyone can easily listen to them in my own voice, and hear my emphasis and inflections. And that’s why I write my prayers out when called upon to pray at a community event. I want to make every effort to say what I mean and mean what I say.

Today’s gospel has had a lot of pastors preaching it over the years, but unfortunately, they miss what it says and thereby miss what it means.

Jesus straight away leaves the Synagogue in Capernaum with Jacob and John coming to the house of Simon and Andrew. And if you’re paying attention right now you know the pericope said it was James and John, not Jacob and John.

“In the 14th century, John Wycliffe made the first Bible translation into English and translated *Iakobus* as James. (However, in both the Old and New Testaments he arbitrarily used

the name Jacob for the patriarch). In all future English translations, the name stuck, especially after 1611, when King James I sponsored the translation then called the Authorized Version. Since 1797 it has been called the King James Bible.  
(<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-versions-and-translations/james-or-jacob-in-the-bible/>)

Hence one translation has forever stuck Jacob with the popular English name James.

Now we see an example of where our English Translations DO NOT say what they mean and mean what they say. Albeit a silly example, it just goes to show you what happens when you are not devoting yourself to God's Word and only trusting others as to what it says.

Billy Graham is the perfect example of this for a pastor who did not know Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. He famously said he always had to trust what other people said God's Word said because he couldn't check it himself.

So, let's get back to the source in our Gospel today and look at what many say is says, and take the time to see what it says. And maybe, just maybe we will understand that God says what He means and means what He says.

Now let me ask you, "Why are you here? Why do you do what you do for a living? Why do you live where you live? What is your purpose?"

When I first entered the work force over 30 years ago after college, there was a famous book everyone was reading called *What Color is Your Parachute?* I never read it, but by all accounts related to me it seems to be a basic self-evaluation tool that helps you define your passions, values, and skills that can be directed in a more definable career path. I know many of my coworkers were into it and using it to define more clearly what their career goals could look like for a more satisfying career.

Later in Seminary, I saw the same technique applied to spiritual gifts inventories and psychological mapping of personality types that help you to build better teams for church work. In a word, defining purpose.

Over the years I have found that they are largely inorganic and tantamount to reading the book "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie, and simply quoting it for any given situation to get the results they want out of people.

I have found all of this to be fake, processed, and completely inorganic if I am saying what I mean and meaning what I say. But, what I have never been disappointed at, is how Jesus comes to us and give us real purpose.

Today's scene at Simon and Andrew's house is just that simple.

Now the basic reader and preacher would look at this and say... "It's a miracle Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law." They might add that the first Pope was obviously married as most Catholics do not confess in their denomination's faith. But what everyone seems to miss, and what God is saying is, "He raised her, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she began to minister!"

Notice it doesn't say serve! And we miss the point of her resurrection altogether if we miss that she was a deaconate, a minister, a worker for the ministry of Jesus.

Next, we see that Jesus heals many who are in a bad way and casts out demons, not letting them speak! Opportunistic preachers have suggested over the years that this is what ministry is supposed to be - talking to demons, naming them, casting them out, healing ministry! But, there are two things wrong with that understanding of what Jesus is doing.

Healing is not his priority. Please don't get me wrong, you know I pray for your healing all the time. You know that I will anoint you for healing every chance I get. You know that I never like to see anyone in pain. With my back problems, pain management, prostrate problems, heart condition, and general decline of my health this year, I want to be healed, as well. And please, don't worry, I have the 6 best doctors in the Golden Triangle working on all of it!

But I know, even if everything is healed for you and for me, it's never permanent. It is always temporary; death comes for us all!

And while talking to demons and casting out demons seems exotic and exciting and all the cool churches are doing it, Jesus won't even let the demons speak at all, and when He talks to them, he says almost nothing at all. After all, the demons are a terrible witness to whom Jesus is and the real purpose for which He came.

So Jesus shows us what He came for today and communicates it, saying what He means and meaning what He says, "I will preach."

I know you all think that is *my* job, but if we're being technical with our Gospel today, clearly, it's Jesus' job.

And I think we mess Jesus up a lot. Have you ever heard of the buddy Jesus? It came from a farcical movie some time ago about angels coming down to earth. Well, some entrepreneurial Christians grabbed that idea and actually made stuffed *Bible Buddies* Jesus dolls you could buy on eBay and cuddle with. The whole *Jesus-is-here-to-comfort-me* idea.

I also heard a pastor say jokingly that we are spending so much money on ministry, our prayers need to say, “Jesus Pay YOUR BILLS” It’s all harmless, but it does betray the way we use Jesus for our ends, and we don’t pay close attention to what He says so we know what He means.

For Jesus, the healings, the casting of demons, the feeding, and the leading - *all lead* to what He’s here to do - the preaching. Proclaiming life eternal for those who believe in Him. Foreshadowing His death and resurrection so we believe we are saved because He took the punishment for our sin. Then, preaching, because it’s not the pastor’s job, it’s not even Jesus’ job anymore. It’s the job of everyone who believes Jesus lives in and through them. And, because He made His dwelling in us, and with us, to make us His collective church on earth; now we can say what He says and mean what He means in everything.

AMEN

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