

Mark 1:21-28      4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany      Jan. 30, 2000

I like helping people. Do you?

I like offering advice that someone else will follow. It makes me feel so strong and powerful and wise.

I like giving some money that will really make a difference. A gift that brings a smile.

I feel good when I can ask the question that opens the door for another to share what has been troubling him or her.

I really like helping people. I am sure you do too.

I like to think that Jesus is just like me in this – spending his time looking for people to help. I like to imagine each day began with Jesus searching out people who needed him. From place to place he would go, offering advice to this one – touching that one, helping, healing.

So you can imagine my surprise when I read the gospel according to St. Mark and find that it is not like that at all.

Jesus does not look for people to help.

People bring their loved ones to Jesus. People bring themselves to Jesus. People reach out and touch Jesus. And whatever they seek from Jesus they receive. But Jesus does not look for people to help.

Take a look at our gospel for today. Jesus is in the synagogue in Capernaum. He is teaching there on the Sabbath. Suddenly there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are the Holy One of God.”

The evil spirit confronted Jesus, challenged Jesus, named Jesus. Only then did Jesus rebuke the spirit and free the man whom the spirit had possessed. The unclean spirit convulsed the man and came out of him.

Now before this confrontation the people were marveling that Jesus taught with authority, and not as the scribes. And after this exorcism the people were amazed and kept on asking, “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.

So what was Jesus teaching that had the crowds marveling so. We are never told.

Sometimes it is said, What you do shouts so loudly that I can't hear what you are saying.

Or it is remarked that children learn from what their parents do – not from what they say.

What was there about Jesus teaching that gave it authority? Maybe it is that Jesus is not in charge.

One person will ask Jesus for healing. Another will reach out to touch him trusting that healing will flow from him. Still another will be brought to Jesus by four friends. They seek something from Jesus. He will give them what they seek. Even when Jesus battles demons they come to him and challenge him. Jesus is not in a demon rebuking campaign.

Even today it is the same. Come to Jesus with your troubles and Jesus helps. How very many of you will testify to that. Healing, strength, hope, the power to forgive, forgiveness for yourself - you have asked, you have received.

But get going down the wrong road and Jesus does not come after you. Jesus does not grab hold of you and shake some sense into you. Jesus just waits as if he is powerless. Waits for you to seek what he alone can give.

Paul said it this way: "Love is patient and kind, love does not insist on its own way. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Love is what is new in Jesus' teaching, love is what is authoritative.

When Jesus calls you to follow it is for you to be like him in this way.

To love is not to have power over another. Not to control another as the evil spirits control, nor to change another into what I am – for that is what the evil spirits do. To love is to do what another asks, to give what another seeks.

When I read in the gospel according to Mark I am surprised to find that Jesus did not go seeking the crowds but the crowds were seeking him. Often he was seeking a lonely place, a time to get away but when others came to him, he served them.

Jesus taught: Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Servants and slaves do what others want. They exercise no power over others.

What a weak way to live.

Our Lord lived in weakness. The one with all authority in heaven and on earth did as a father with a dying daughter commanded, and as lepers requested.

The one who could command all the armies of angels suffered a beating from the army of Rome, spitting, mocking.

The one whose voice the very elements obeyed in creation was silent before his accusers.

Yet God has made his weakness greater than any strength for in the weakness of Jesus' dying is your salvation. What you could not accomplish through working every day of your living Jesus has earned in the hour of his dying. In weakness.

Take up your cross and follow me, he invites. He will teach you to love as he loves.