

Sermon – 4th Sunday of Epiphany, Yr. B – Mark 1: 21-28

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be in that synagogue in Capernaum that Sabbath morning when Jesus showed up? Those folks who unknowingly invited Jesus, the Son of God, into their midst to teach, experienced some pretty amazing things. Things that I am sure made them sit up and take notice. I'm not sure they ever realized who Jesus really was, but they knew there was something very different about him. To start with there was something different about the way Jesus taught. He wasn't like the scribes, who were fine teachers but taught in a different way. As Dr. Robert Jeffress pointed out in his article ***Jesus Taught with Authority***: "When the scribes taught in the synagogue, they just quoted one expert after another, one opinion after another, and one tradition after another. But Jesus spoke with the authority of God Himself." Jesus' authority came from God, not from humans. I imagine the people present that day also sensed God's presence as Jesus healed a suffering man on the Sabbath. In that moment Jesus was teaching, not with words, but with His actions. He cared so much for that man who was suffering that he healed him, even on the Sabbath. He healed the man, who was crying out, in a way that those witnessing it had never seen before. Jesus showed them that with

the authority of God, what may seem impossible, is possible. Let's face it, when we invite God into our lives, we should expect the unexpected. Amazing, mysterious, and great things can happen.

There is a video that Presiding Bishop Curry made in 2014, entitled ***Eucharist***, that touches on the power and mystery that happens when God shows up. Towards the end of the video, Presiding Bishop Curry says:

"What do you say to a person who is dying? I have no words adequate. What do you say to a person on death row? I have no words that are adequate. What do you say to a person who is addicted to a life that is destroying them? I don't have the words and you don't, but Jesus does. In that Eucharistic moment where a simple bread and a simple wine is taken, blessed, broken, and given, all I know is Jesus shows up, it's a mystery, and it's strange, and it is God!"

There is such truth to that statement. You see when we invite God into the midst of what we are doing mysterious, strange, and amazing things can happen.

A number of years ago, the parish I was serving at received a call that a parishioner, who was in hospice care, really wanted someone to bring her communion. I don't remember exactly why but, for some reason no one was available to do that for over 24 hours. I was the first one who

was available, so I took Communion out to her as soon as I could. By the time I arrived the parishioner, who had requested communion, was unconscious. She had been unconscious for nearly 24 hours and was not expected to regain consciousness again. The family had gathered by her bedside, grieving the fact that some of them had not been able to talk to their loved one before she lost consciousness, in particular, her grandson. I let the family know that it was very important to their loved one, who was dying, to have Communion one last time. The grandson had no idea what Communion was or why it was important to his grandmother. As the family gathered around her bed, I explained to this young man, in about 5 minutes, how Communion was a reminder of what Jesus did for each of us. It was a reminder of the promises that his grandmother was holding onto, the promise that Jesus died for our sins and that He has gone to prepare a place for her, and each of us, in heaven. Then, I looked at the family members, especially the grandson, and asked if they would like to honor their loved one's wish and celebrate Communion around her bed. They agreed. As I turned around to get the kit to set up for Communion, I heard a gasp and excitement coming from the family. The parishioner, who had wanted Communion, had opened her eyes and was conscious. She stayed conscious long enough to receive Communion and talk to her family, especially her grandson. As I prepared to leave, her grandson came

over and couldn't thank me enough for what I had done. My response to him was, "that wasn't me, that was God."

When that parishioner requested Communion, God was invited into that room. He was invited into that room with the prayer that I prayed before entering her room, and God showed up. The parishioner, who was dying, once again experienced that promise of her salvation. The grandson, seemingly for the first time, experienced God's presence and promises, and the family was reminded that death is not the end but the beginning.

When God is invited in, things are different, not quite the same. Communion is no longer just bread and wine, death becomes a sacred and holy time, our worship services are more powerful, and our daily life is lived more fully as children of God. Let's face it, when we invite God into our lives, something different happens, something powerful, something unexpected. It's a mystery, it's strange, and it is God!

Amen.