



Stained-glass composition by J Le Breton, Cathedrale d'Amiens, Amiens, France 1508-1519

Mark 1:21-28

Knowing

Prayer: Gracious God, we who have dared to speak for you pause now to listen in prayer. We are thankful for the evidence of your justice, faithfulness, and healing power. May your love strengthen us, keep us attentive to your word, and your divine work in our world...

I'd like to begin by quoting the opening of Mark Yaconelli's terrific new book, *Between the Listening and the Telling*, which we will be reading as part of our Lenten Soup and Soul series this year.

"There are moments, often unexpected, when you find yourself at home in your own life. Simple, gentle, ordinary moments. Standing at the kitchen window. Rain outside. The earth springing into green and yellow. The birds, the ridiculous birds, singing without worry beneath the gray sky. For some reason, without effort, the anxiety lifts, your chest relaxes, your senses awaken, a quiet descends, and you are home. It is in moments like this when I can feel how distant I have been from the life I long to live..."

I am looking forward to reading this with you. The book, like our text today connects words and healing.¹

The writer of the gospel of Mark, shows Jesus' teaching ministry simultaneously with his healing ministry. Two sides of one coin. Jesus entered the synagogue at Capernaum and began to teach, and one of the outcomes of this teaching is healing – freeing a man who had been persecuted by this torment in his body. (Another outcome is that it was witnessed and written down.)

Jesus was a teacher. His subject was the fulfillment of the scriptures...now. Martin Luther King, Jr summed this up famously with his words: "The time is always right to do what is right." When Jesus interpreted the scriptures, he is fulfilling what we call the Old Testament. They never called Jesus, Reverend, or Professor, or Doctor, or even Father; they called him "Rabbi" which means "teacher." So, Jesus enters the synagogue and teaches them...this may seem unimpressive

¹ I love that he begins the book with this idea of being "at home in your life" and ends the book with an entire chapter called simply "home."

to you...it is not dramatic like stilling a storm on the sea, or curing a blind man, or raising a young girl from the dead...it is just another sermon. (She says, preaching just another sermon.) Mark says that all who heard Jesus' teaching were astounded at his teaching, because he taught them as one having authority." Put a pin in that, *authority* – we'll come back to that.

But this class gets more interesting – you could say there is a lab afterwards. A man barges into the synagogue screaming, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth...I know who you are, the Holy One of God!” (That is what they called the prophets².) Jesus rebuked what the Bible calls the “unclean” spirit within the man, that strange spirit which knew more about Jesus than anyone else in the synagogue – he knew who he was – and the man was healed. People were amazed saying, “What is this? It is a new teaching! And with authority!”

Mark does not tell us *what* Jesus taught. We hear *how* he taught, and we hear testimony about his results – Jesus teaches with authority, authority over the spirits that torment people, authority over life and death, good and evil. With authority that brought healing. Jesus is the teacher whose teaching is not only in his words, but also in his actions.

Think about all the authorities in your life. Children are governed by tons of authorities, school rules, playground rules, house rules, rules in other people's houses... some of them surprisingly strict. All of us live under authorities: the government here in the United States, the rules that govern travel, traffic rules, taxes, have you been to the DMV(?), the prices we pay for things fixed by authorities well beyond our control, an illness can claim authority of our own body, a family member can make a claim on us with authority which we will follow, maybe even welcome. When they say that Jesus has authority, it was in the context of someone with power over other authorities. A power to subvert and overturn other authorities. This will become a problem for him later, but I am getting ahead of my story – we'll leave that for Holy Week, when he is perceived as a threat to political authorities.

Paul Achtemeier makes the point in his commentary on Mark that the power of Jesus is present in his words as well as in his being. And his words continue to carry the same power to change lives as did his miraculous presence in Galilee long ago. So, for those who have only the teaching, and not Jesus' presence, we still have access to the same divine power!^[2]

Jesus named in that synagogue the spirit which held that man captive and gave it the simple command to leave him. All these years later, it is still amazing. I'm amazed, and all I did was read it. How Jesus isn't confused by who the man is and who the spirit is, -- which is whom -- he doesn't get involved in the explanations about how it got this way; you can spend a lot of time on the psychology of this healing miracle – and many have. You can spend a lot of time parsing these questions, diagnosing the problem, but Jesus doesn't go there. Jesus knows spirits and knows humans, (he is divine and human) and Jesus commands them both. Do you know that kind of healing? Do you know the power of this new teaching?

- When Justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?
- The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your mind, and with all of your heart and with all of your might; and another is like it: to love your neighbor as yourself.
- You will forgive 70 times 7 times.
- You who are without sin, you cast the first stone.

² e.g. 2 Kings 4:9 Elisha possessed of a divine power.

- I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

As we come to the Annual meeting of our congregation, we are challenged about what can happen in a faith community. We arrive here expecting some encounter with the divine...but it happens...and what a shock when it happens! What if Niantic Community Church became a place where people encountered healing? Where we are “at home in our lives.” As Mark Yaconelli says. What if we recognized the work of God in our midst clearly enough to be able to go and tell others what difference Jesus has made for us? What if it already has, and we need to bear witness to it.

Healing happens when everything that keeps you away from God, falls away; and you’re able to get up and walk into a new morning, forgiven for your sins, and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus called that experience being born again. Or born of the Spirit or born from above.... (he tries out all that language). In Mark the news spreads like wildfire and in the next chapter, Jesus heals a leper and afterwards needs a security detail, he is overwhelmed by crowd control problems. He moves out to the countryside, and people go to see him there – the scripture says, “from every quarter.”

It is the only reasonable response to a man with this authority...with this new teaching. To mob him.

Sometimes the most confusing thing in this world is ourselves, our own thoughts and actions – the restless human heart. We need a teacher; we could use a healer.

Later, Mark says that this teacher commanded the waves of the sea to be silent, and they were (4:38). The teacher raised a little girl from the dead (5:35), fed a thousand people with just a few loaves of bread (6:34), and cured a man of epilepsy (9:17).

This teacher, Jesus our teacher, died when he was 33 years old. We can’t feel his touch, as some have witnessed it historically. But today, his power and authority are still carried in his words. And we can feel the touch of his hand, in the touch of others who bear witness to him. Today we live by faith. Come, receive this new teaching, let the love of God heal our hearts and minds, bodies and souls. As Mark Yaconelli says, “at home in your own life.” You will know it, when you know it.

^[1] John 8:32

^[2] Pp. 78 Paul Achtemeier, Proclamation Commentaries, Mark