

Sermon Title: “Smikah”

January 31st, 2021 – 4th Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Mark 1:21-28

Theme:

What’s in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I remember watching the opening of “NBC’s Saturday Night,” (I know, I’m showing my age), and the host, Paul Simon, was recalling and interacting with all of these different people who had attended his concerts over the years. “I know you. You were at the Central Park Concert, etc.” As popular as Paul Simon once was, it would of course be impossible for him to remember all of his fans who attended each and every concert, but the joke came when Art Garfunkel walked out on stage, and Paul had no idea who he was. It was, of course, a joke, as Simon and Garfunkel would have a reunion concert every time they needed an infusion of cash (and they didn’t even buy GameStop Stock). Yes, this was a silly skit, but it illustrates how we can be recognized from events in our past, and sometimes not remembered when we think we should be.

In our Gospel Text today, Mark loves to tell us again what Jesus does “immediately.” Just after calling four young fishermen around the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and company immediately head over to the Capernaum Synagogue to observe the Jewish Sabbath. It’s a short distance from Peter’s House, which will serve as home base for Jesus, and what does Jesus do there? He enters and immediately starts teaching and the people there were astonished. Why? It has to do not just with *what* Jesus said, but *how* he said it.

Only about 5 rabbis of Jesus’ day had the authority to issue their own interpretations of Scripture. Gamaliel, Paul’s rabbi, was one of those few. In order to have Smikah, the Hebrew word for Authority, you had to be certified by two other Rabbis with Smikah. Every other Rabbi had to teach by quoting other Rabbis. There were two collections of these interpretations called the Talmud. One from Babylon, one from Alexandria and they dated back to the exile period. Another collection called the Mishna, would come later. The Pharisees in particular were very worried about making sure that they obeyed every single command of God as written down in the Old Testament, and they took a very legalistic view of it. They invented their own rules on top of the Old Testament just to make sure they



didn't break any of God's commandments. Over time however, these interpretations of Scripture took on a life of their own and became the focus of the Pharisee's teaching.

So here comes Jesus with His new Disciples. He walks into the Jewish Synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath and immediately starts teaching, astonishing the audience. Why? Because He spoke with Smikah. He preached God's Word plainly without having to cite the work of other Rabbis. This is why Jesus is routinely challenged by the Pharisees.

Jesus isn't done demonstrating His Divine nature, however. He isn't the only one there, someone shows up with an unclean spirit. True to form, when unholy beings come into contact with a Holy God, conflict ensues, and Jesus wins. Notice how nobody else seems to know who Jesus really is, but this unclean spirit makes a scene and publicly identifies Jesus for who He really is, the prophesied Messiah. Jesus commands the unclean spirit to come out of the man and vanishes from the story.

The crowd is amazed that not only does Jesus speak with authority, but even demons follow his commands. We know that Jesus is giving His own interpretations of Scripture, because the crowd tells us that it is a "new teaching." They haven't connected all of the dots, but they are starting to connect some of them. It didn't take long for word to spread around the whole region of Galilee what Jesus has done.

We are all at different stages in our walk with Jesus. Some of us are just starting out like the Disciples or the members of this Synagogue. We are just starting to connect the dots. We are amazed that Jesus speaks with Authority. There's nothing wrong with being in this category. It's just where many of us are in our walk with Jesus. We all have to start somewhere, and notice how Jesus comes to us, not the other way around. Jesus does not turn his back on these folks and He won't turn His back on you if you are in this category. Jesus will routinely visit the Synagogue and continue to teach, just like He continues to teach each and every one of us.

Others of us are more practiced in looking to see what God is doing in our lives. That's not to say that we're experts but taking the time to see what God has been doing in our lives rarely goes unrewarded. God has a purpose for each and every one of us. We are not here by chance, and God includes us in His Mission of Salvation. He loves us and He uses us for His purposes. Some of us just have a little more practice than others in looking for it. God has placed people in our lives for a purpose. Sometimes that purpose is revealed to us, sometimes not. But even if it's not, let me reassure you that God has your best interests at heart.

I know that many of you are worried about this pandemic. Covid-19 is kind of like the unclean spirit of our time. Back then people who were demonically possessed acted strangely and people didn't want much to do with them. Covid-19 has similarly affected how we look at each other. Because of the pandemic, we try to keep our distance and we sometimes look at each other as though we're the disease itself. Now there's a vaccine and many of us can't wait to get vaccinated, while some don't ever

want to be vaccinated. Now we're also hearing about new strains of the virus. Is the vaccine still effective? Does it work? When can I get it? When can we go back to normal? I know a lot of us are wondering about that one. Know this, just as Jesus has authority over unclean spirits, He has authority over Covid-19. Even though the virus always seems to be a step or two ahead of us, it can't outrun Jesus. He also has the authority to forgive you of all of your sins.

How does Jesus exert authority over our lives, you might ask? He gives us His Word and Sacraments. He says to us, "I'm right here with you. The bad things in your life don't win in the end, I do." But most of all, Jesus says to us, "I am coming soon." So, start out by listening to Jesus. Receive what He offers you. Look around for what Jesus may be doing in your life. Then teach others to do the same. When life gets messy, know that we have a Savior that knows us and loves us and He has the authority to do something about it. Come to think about it, He already did, when He died on the Cross. When He died on that Cross and rose from the dead, Jesus placed limits on how much harm could come to us. Now that's some kind of authority. I know that Jesus will get us through this pandemic, pastoral vacancy, and everything else that is thrown at us. I also know that we'll come out the other side stronger. Like those folks at the Synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus never fails to amaze me.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Quotations from Scripture come from:

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