

Mark 1: 21-28
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1.31.21

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
My God, I put my trust in you.

Many moons ago I was a fresh faced social worker learning the hard truths about in home crisis work and its many facets. I attended lots of trainings: there were trainings on active listening & how to de-escalate crisis situations. Some trainings focused on assessing mental health while others taught about the latest deadly recreational drugs and what it smells like when someone is cooking methamphetamine in their basement. I learned about the installation of car seats, best practices for safe sleep & where to position myself at a home visit to have easy access to the door. In one training we even practiced rolling our pant legs up to prevent cockroaches and bed bugs from hitching a ride home with us. Glamour at its finest!!

I learned really valuable information from educated professionals. They presented things with great confidence and professionalism. I had an office filled with binders of graphs, charts & handouts like "5 things to say when you feel stuck."

And then I went out into the world and started meeting with families – real live, flesh & blood experts who taught me the realities of their world. Like.....

*How to stretch a minimum wage income to feed a family of five & the obstacles of getting to a food bank while holding down a full-time job.

*The deep sorrow and shame that accompanies addiction.

*The tender attention to bruises, welts, broken bones & burns from the man who says he loves you & that next time he will kill you if you try to leave.

*The outpouring of grief & confusion when a mother is told that her boyfriend has been sexually assaulting her child.

*And I learned that when I got "stuck" it's pretty powerful to just sit with someone in silence and honor their story.

For over thirty years I have been amazed and in awe of the willingness that women & men & children have demonstrated as they taught me raw truth from a place of authority. There is no book or diagram or training that can take the place of this.....

I wonder if the people in the synagogue at Capernaum felt some of these same stirrings when Jesus taught them in a way they were not accustomed to. The people had become familiar with the teachings of the scribes who taught by citing the opinions of various rabbis on different matters, appealing not to their own authority but to the authority of others.

Jesus' teaching was rooted in God's word, first and foremost. And, as theologian Cynthia Bourgeault reminds us, "Jesus stayed close to the ground of wisdom: the transformation of human consciousness. He asked timeless and personal questions like 'Is it possible to live on

this planet with a generosity, abundance, fearlessness, and beauty that mirror Divine Being itself?" When Jesus taught, people sensed something was different.....His message was urgent, bold and demanding.

The people were certainly not used to thought-provoking, soul-wrenching questions inside the walls of the synagogue. I envision them holding onto his every word, overcome with Hope for things to come; huddling together with whispered excitement. The Good News was seeping into the air of the synagogue and spilling into the streets of Capernaum. Men were intrigued about this new way of thinking and brought home innovative ideas to share at the dinner table. Jesus brought an electric energy to this community.

Our Lord is a wise moral philosopher who spoke with Divine authority. And when the unclean spirit challenged Jesus right there in the synagogue amongst all the people where he was sharing God's truth so beautifully, Jesus barely skipped a beat. He spoke to that unclean spirit liked he owned it, telling it to "Be silent and come out of him." And the spirit obeyed....How's that for Divine authority?!

We know very little about the man who had been carrying around the weight of the unclean spirit. Had the spirit been dwelling inside him for a long time? I wonder if he mourned the loss of the unclean spirit....it was a familiar part of him. How would he cope without it?

I trust that Jesus gave special care to this man, inviting him to travel with him and filling him with the love of the **Holy** Spirit. He was filled to the brim with all that goodness – no room for the unclean spirit if it came knocking again.

Jesus did not simply teach the Scriptures, he was calling people to a personal response; to be engaged in action facilitated by love. There is a deep connection between the teachings of Jesus and the voice of the people who are marginalized in our communities. We often find it easier to turn away from people who have stories of grave hardship and violence because it makes us feel uncomfortable. But when we stay and keep showing up to hear more of their unprocessed truth we are sending the message that we view them as the authority of their lives. We don't provide ready responses & easy solutions – because.....there are no easy solutions. We see God in their eyes. We hear God in their ability to survive using very creative strategies. We embrace and respect their connection to us – linked together through Christ. There's nothing more powerful than that.....

Theologian, Dorothee Soelle says, "Allowing God to fully inhabit our senses does not mean we close ourselves off from the world but open ourselves more fully to it. We are free to be fully ourselves but not to exist only for ourselves. We are free to become Christ in the world to the same extent that we recognize the Christ in others, especially the last and the least." Such great wisdom.....it reminds us that our commitment to one another is a life-long vow. May we re-commit to it every day and live into it with God's love, grace and authority. Amen.