

“Be Still and Know That I am God”
+ 4 Epiphany Year B +
Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28
February 1, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. The text for this morning’s message is the Gospel for this day.

“Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God.”

Today, we pick up Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. He’s rounded up a band of disciples and has put together his ministry team. And I’m thinking that this must be about the time the disciples start to ask questions about this rabbi/teacher they have left everything to follow. ‘Who is this guy really?’ ‘Where exactly are we going?’ ‘Where are we going to sleep tonight?’ Or even something simpler, like, ‘when’s lunch?’ Those really weren’t imminent worries as they were in Capernaum (where Peter, Andrew, James and John had homes – and plenty of fish) but it was the Sabbath so Jesus takes his ministry team to the temple for worship, “as was His custom.” Then, Jesus begins to preach.

Frederick Buechner says that the most hopeful part of the church service is the moment the preacher walks to the pulpit and turns on the light in the pulpit. It’s in that moment that the congregation waits for a word from God... hoping, maybe, there might be a word for you in your life – that, maybe, you’ll hear something to deliver you from whatever you are facing today, this week, or just down the road.

I can imagine that was exactly the feeling in the temple when Jesus got up to preach that morning, this new rabbi everyone was talking about who’d picked 4 of their local men as disciples: And whatever Jesus had chosen to speak about, the text says, the ‘hearers were amazed by it’- and they were talking amongst themselves (such whispering was allowed during the sermon – like the AMENS I used to get when preaching in Mississippi). The murmuring was exciting, “Isn’t Jesus fantastic! He brings the scriptures to life. He makes this real for us! He knows what he’s talking about- not like the scribes- but someone with authority!”

Until someone speaks out in the strange voice of one oppressed by an unclean spirit...just a man, in church, someone with an unclean spirit. I contend it is best not to sensationalize this – make the man a stranger but, rather, to remember we are all sinners – all with sins that oppress

and bind us. This is just such a man who has heard the authority of God made flesh in Jesus and that which was unclean in him could not keep silent. Think of him, if you will, as one of those like all of us waiting in the silence of hope as the pulpit light comes on - one of us – a sinner in need of a Savior.

Jesus – the only preacher ever able to speak 100% with the authority of God reaches into this man – to the unclean spirit and that man touched by that authority shouts out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Personalize that, please, ask yourself looking at Jesus, “What have you to do with us? With us? Who is ‘US’ Pastor Bob?” But think about it – each of you, me included is really an “Us” - a different person, different people on the inside and outside? (A Psychiatrist friend once pointed out we are all, in our way, multiple personalities – pulling out the one we want certain people to see at certain times). Couldn’t each of us cry out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus, don’t you only want to deal with the very best of who I am, not the worst?”

For any of us, perhaps the "us" includes a sleeping baby in a blanket who won their parent’s hearts at first glance... the toddler in their first Easter outfit... the awkward teenager who talked back in anger saying hurtful words only a parent could forgive, dropping out, walking away... perhaps a college freshman unsure what they want to study or where they’re headed – who makes some horrible and some not quite so horrible choices. “Us” the people stuck in jobs that are just work, who are lonely and angry at God because we have no one or we don’t like the one we made those vows and promises to. “Us” who thought retirement would mean a time of ease – not just going to doctors and lining up treatment plans, losing loved ones... ALL those parts are "us" because they will always live in us- and "us," if we’re honest have gotten very good at hiding the unsightly “us” under the skin we are in.

And so for this man, those parts... those unacknowledged but still present parts cry out together...as he shouts to Jesus, “What do you want with us!” Because amidst all the memories and hopes and experiences of all the people we are, there are things we don't want to look at that the Gospel – words of forgiveness and hope poke ... and it hurts – change, repentance hurts! There’s fear - pain repressed for years. There’s anxiety and worry pressed down and only let out when we’re alone - hurts - some caused by the people we loved and trusted most."

It only takes away from the recognition of our own sinfulness when we concentrate on whether the man that day had a demonic spirit because any of us face to face with the holiness and authority of God must ask, “What have you to do with us, Jesus? I am sinful. I am afraid.” The hurts – the wounds that bind me – the sins that torture me have kept and keep me from the greatness, the vastness touch of your love, O God, made flesh in Jesus Christ, are keeping me from the mending and redeeming of my broken souls and healed and renewed relationships with others.

But, then again, where would that leave us? It would make us completely dependent on God’s grace made known to us in Christ Jesus, gifted to us in faith. It would mean turning again and again to the forgiveness that is ours in baptism, feasting at God’s table for assurance of salvation and the promise of heaven – it would mean hearing, learning and sharing God’s Word and actively being part of God’s fellowship, the church and giving of all that we have and are to the mission of God’s Kingdom.

Yes, I’ve said that often but if you really stop and consider it – this total reliance on Jesus not only to give you heaven but work to do right now, total dependence on God’s grace – well, it is a scary place for people, especially Americans to be - we like control- we like being in charge of ourselves and not being dependent on anyone!

Is it any wonder the man was coughing and convulsing when Jesus was healing him? We don’t want to give up our self-sufficiency. We don’t want to give up our defenses. And, as you well know, this struggle doesn’t only happen once. It happens over and over again because we are all sinners in need of a Savior – the Savior God gave us in Christ Jesus, who didn’t and doesn’t just come to us with grace, faith, hope, new beginnings and vision for the present and the future just once – no, Jesus is there for us and with us again and again – in all circumstances, knowing fully all of the people in each one of “us” - all of the facets of our personality. As Scripture says, “while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us.” Thank God, that the Holy Spirit continues to renew us to heal our hurts – help us let go of those things we grab onto so tightly so we can more fully walk in newness of life.

And scary as it may be to think of being that vulnerable and that open with anyone, God already knows everything, all you've done, all that has ever happened to you, and everything you are!. And despite what you may think of yourself, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ God loves you anyway. And, each day, in our baptismal grace when the darkness shouts out from us Jesus says "Be still, be silent... I'll take care of this for you." And Jesu looks to the monsters who have so valiantly guarded your heart- "Come out of there... I'm here now... I'm the one who can love him, love her as they need to be loved, the one they can trust... the one they can depend on... and I'll never leave them alone." AMEN.