

The Fourth Sunday in the Year of Mark.

This was his first big public appearance and presentation. The synagogue was packed and they'd been here before. Teachers good and bad; preachers; wonder workers. This was Capernaum. It wasn't quite that people came here to make a name for themselves but a lot of people passed through and this one surpassed all the others. And the man who was possessed was nothing new. He was disruptive and destroyed the peace so he was to be thrown out.

Jesus cast out the evil spirit and the man was restored. Healers has done this kind of thing before but this action of Jesus claimed the people's attention and gave them an abiding sense that God was intervening in their lives. Inevitably they compared Jesus to their own scribes who were their own religious guides, but Jesus was in a different category. Somehow there was a new strength in his word which was always effective and accompanied by new power.

Everyone was astonished not only because the man was healed but the implications were huge. God could heal a man or woman possessed and Jesus had done this work of God. Who then was he? The question set in train a series of other troubling questions. If then this man was doing the work of God, where did this event leave their synagogue and their religious leaders and practice, especially as they complained about Jesus and what he had done. Jesus is revealed as the strong one with a new power, with divine authority to restore humanity at every level and make it new. Jesus had authority that surpassed that of their own scribes.

Why were they so astonished and surprised? Had they forgotten the message of Moses that we have just heard in our reading from Deuteronomy? Not only had they forgotten, they were blind and deaf to Jesus who is the fulfillment of Moses' promise of a new prophet with new power. A new Moses in fact.

The evil spirit claimed knowledge of Jesus identity. People believed that if that ever happened the spirit would have complete control over the person. This did not happen to Jesus because even the evil spirits obeyed him. He was and is the presence of the infinite power of God. He is the strong one over whom the power of evil has no sway.

Jesus appears at the start of this Gospel as the one who had absolute power for good. If evil disrupts human lives in so many ways – through illness, abuse, injustice, exploitation or greed – Jesus comes as God's agent, his sacrament in fact, his prophet in whom God's Good News is real and active.

So as we begin to listen to Mark's gospel this year, the first experience of Jesus ministry is of teaching and healing where Jesus shows he acts in the name, power and person of God himself.

We may not be sitting in the Capernaum synagogue but we are gathered in faith listening to the same Jesus as they did. His teaching and action challenged them to allow their lives to be changed by him and the same challenge is offered to each and all of us. A challenge which is the way to truth and life because that is precisely what Jesus is: truth and life who comes to us with his absolute power for good which casts out all forms of evil and restores to wholeness.

Accept the challenge to change is always difficult and painful because we must leave behind what is tried and tested, warm and familiar, but that is a temptation to refuse life and accept the way of evil.

So be changed by this word today. Turn or perhaps, return, to seeing Jesus as the one who is presently working in our lives, in our sinfulness to cast out the hurt and replace it with his joy. Trust with your life.

Be changed by this word today. See the healing and restoring Spirit of Jesus at work when anxiety gives way to a sense of well being, when relationships bring ease and new energy, when sexual partnership celebrates total and life long commitment, respect and mutual acceptance; when forgiveness of another brings new life and opportunity.

Be changed by the Lord's word today by accepting in trust the words of St. Paul and be free from worry. Let us renew our confidence in the goodness of God revealed in Jesus Christ and therefore give our undivided attention to him. The world and life is full of many gifts, all of them good and given by God. Given not as ends in themselves but to bring us closer and closer to God. The danger is that we so often lose sight of our relationship with God and become totally absorbed in the gifts of creation and the exhilaration of living. When this happens we have lost sight of the bigger picture and the reason for living. Then we drift into worry, anxiety and fear which destroys. With generous and simple prayer, with trust in his power and with openness to love we can restore the balance lost by our over attentiveness to the delights of life.