

July 5, 2015

“Where Did Jesus Get All This?”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Mark 6: 1-13

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Jesus was back in his hometown—the hardest place for any preacher to preach, that’s for sure—and sure enough, many who heard him teaching were astounded. By the time he was teaching there that day, his reputation had already preceded him. They’d already heard all about how he’d calmed the wind and sea and how he healed a suffering woman and a twelve-year old girl.

“Where did this man Jesus get all this?” they asked. “What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power have been done by his hands!”

In this passage Andy read for us, through the questions of the hometown people, Mark’s Gospel takes us right to the heart of Jesus’ authority and power. By putting our questions in the mouths of those hometown folks, Mark is giving us a window into just what kind of king Jesus really is, and pointing us to the source of Jesus’ authority, and will go on to show us the qualities with which Jesus exercises his authority.

After all, Jesus was a young man, who yet showed an incredible depth of wisdom in his teaching. He was a carpenter’s son who had the gift of healing. He was from “nowheresville” Nazareth, of all places, yet he had the power to calm the forces of nature itself, the wind and the sea.

“Where did this man Jesus get all this?”

Just the right question to ponder on this Sunday when we celebrate the beginning of a new appointment year. All United Methodist clergy are appointed by our bishop one year at a time, July 1-June 30. So, Robert, Keri, and I, along with Tricia Lindley who is beginning the candidacy process, and I suspect even those who are retired—Larry Young, Dorothy Worley-- we all pause and reflect around this time of year on this vocation to which we have been called, this calling which has been tested, and verified, and authorized by the church. Because while the church confirms our call, the call itself and the ensuing equipping for ministry must come from God, if it is to be authentic and sustained over time.

And always, our lodestone, our guide and truest mentor, is Jesus of Nazareth.

What kind of spiritual leader was he? Where did he get his wisdom, his authority, his power? How did he use it?

As is made clear throughout Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ authority comes from his deep, obedient faith. His authority comes from God and God alone. He is not like earthly kings and rulers. For this reason, Jesus’ work of healing and teaching extends beyond any and all socially created norms and strictures. Jesus can thus minister to Jairus, rich and powerful, and to the hemorrhaging woman, marginal and “unclean.” He can touch with his wisdom the lawyer who comes to him seeking the meaning of life as well as his friend Lazarus whom he brings back from the grave. He can take water from the Samaritan woman at the well and offer her the living water of life. He can eat with sinners and heal on the Sabbath.

His authority comes from God and it knows no boundaries, no limits. The Kingdom of God is for all. Jesus’ mercy and compassion heal any who stand in need of the grace of God.

And unlike earthly kings and rulers, Jesus is eager to empower all those who share this faith. This is what the second half of today's reading reveals to us. Starting with the twelve, and extending across the centuries to us all, clergy and lay alike, he gives authority to teach and preach and heal. The same authority God gives to him he gives to us all who believe. Jesus delegates his authority to all who come in faith on behalf of any and all who are in need in any way. This is what we call "discipleship," this interlocking networking community of all those Jesus himself commissions and authorizes to bring forth the kingdom. Faith brings authority and authority brings shared responsibility.

To be clear, this is not a hierarchical authority such as we know through most human systems, top down, arbitrary, chain of command. Jesus' authority is gently and lovingly conferred on those who will receive it. His power is exercised by freely sharing it with those who come in faith. And his rule looks first to those who need it most, any whom the world might ignore or cast aside.

What kind of spiritual leader is Jesus? He is a loving child of God who welcomes children, reaches out to the least and the lost, and invites all into relationship, into a covenant, into community, into "church" in the broadest sense.

In our Methodist understanding, from the time of John Wesley, we all serve together, lay and ordained, elders and deacons, lay servant ministers, each of us given grace, as the Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, "according to the measure of Christ's gift....The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Eph. 4:7, 11-13)

Everyone who comes in faith is given authority and has a ministry. Everyone, each one of us, is involved in the ministry of the church.

This is who Jesus is. And this is who we are. Called and gifted, empowered and sent.

In this new Appointment Year, may God deepen our faith after the example of Jesus. May God open the eyes and ears of our hearts to claim our gifts for ministry and respond to our unique call with joy. May God pour out a new Spirit on the church this day as we celebrate this new Appointment Year praying together:

"God of grace and God of glory, pour out your power on us your servants, lay and ordained, to serve you faithfully, whole-heartedly, and creatively. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Clothe us with a loving heart, a searching mind, an instinct for mercy, a thirst for justice, and a hunger for your kingdom. Equip us well for the work that lies ahead, that we may be one in ministry to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

Notes:

Mark D. W. Edington, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 3. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Jeffrey D. Jones. Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches. Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.

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