

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Psalm 111

Mark 1:21-28

It is of supreme importance that we get it RIGHT.

Throughout the centuries since Jesus walked the earth,
we have struggled to comprehend his life... his death... his resurrection.

What did it mean? What does it mean for us today?

Scholars and theologians, teachers and students, disciples and even pastors
have pondered and prayed; read and studied...

searched the scriptures for understanding.

Throughout the centuries since Jesus walked the earth,

billions of books have been written about him...

doctrines developed...

orthodoxies proclaimed, defined, and defended...

Christians have fought battles over orthodoxy—RIGHT teaching—

in order guarantee orthopraxis ... right living ...

ensure purity ...

safeguard our sanctity.....

Hmm! That's not too unlike the Jews of ancient Israel, who pondered the law...

the priests and Sadducees, the scribes and those Pharisees,

the ones who knew—

or thought they knew—

with every fiber of their being they knew—

that it is of the utmost importance that we get it RIGHT.....

Please pray with me: God and Father of us all, you created us with hearts that are restless until they find their rest in you. May we meet you in your word this morning, even as you are here to meet us. Amen.

So, if it is important that we get it RIGHT, how do we do that? How do we get it right?

We read the gospels, of course:

those accounts of who Jesus was, what he did, how he lived,
and died,
and rose again.

Yeah, that's how we get it right.

The problem, though, is that we do not have one account of who Jesus is, but four.

Four very different accounts, very different perspectives,
four different portraits of our Lord.

God's Word is like that.

Much as we may delight in figuring it out and fencing it off

it defies our attempts to make it tidy, to box it in, to tie it down.

It has a tendency to wiggle out between the cracks and giggle at us from across the room

- ha! ha! I'm over here! no, here I am! no, here! no, over here!

This is the delightful nature of scripture:

it runs down the road before us beckoning us onward,

deeper and deeper and deeper

into the discovery of God,

into an encounter with the Risen Christ, the Word made flesh.

Let us listen together for the Good News for us today, from the Gospel of Mark 1:21-28 -

They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

On this Sabbath Day, Jesus walks into the house of worship.

The congregation is settled in,

ready because that is where you go on Saturday night—
or Sunday morning.

They come because their parents did, or because their friends do,
or because they've come for so long it's like an old habit—
like a comfortable pair of shoes.

They come, not really expecting anything extraordinary.

They come, hardly expecting Jesus to show up.....

He preaches profoundly, unlike anyone they've ever heard before.

The congregation smiles and nods,

and turns to their neighbor with a sideways glance, a nudge and a whispered

"Wow! this guy is good!"

"Yeah! he preaches a lot better than the regular dude!"

Mark says, in so many Greek words, they were blown away.

But then, just at the critical point of the sermon,

somebody starts yelling from the back of the sanctuary -

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?

Heads turn, necks crane, shshshshsh!

But the unclean spirit,

resident in the house of worship,

is disturbed by—no, terrified of—the spirit of Christ, the Holy One of God ...

After all, Jesus comes, out-scripturing the scribes,

poking holes through the façade of the Pharisees...

Jesus comes, disturbing all the spirits who think they're in charge,

the ones who are certain they have got it right.

Even those—especially those— in the house of the worship.

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?

Now, from the distance of our 21 centuries, and from the comfort of our padded pews,
we may be tempted to explain the man with the unclean spirit
as a troubled soul - a disturbed psyche,
an outsider pays no heed to the social boundaries of the ordinary decent folk.
It is a common perspective in today's biblical study
that those inhabited by disruptive spirits in the scriptures
in reality suffered the spectrum of mental illness we have other names for today...
But I wonder—don't you wonder?—if the man who disrupts worship in the synagogue
is not rather what we would call a "boat-rocker"
a "rabble-rouser" ...
The one who speaks up to tell the truth no one wants to hear...
to ask the question no one else cares to ask...
The only one who knows the truth about Jesus Christ down deep in his bones
and it disturbs him...
as it should disturb us all...

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

It is disturbing.

After all, Jesus walks into the church and starts breaking down all we hold holy,
pointing out the flaws in our faith,
revealing the inadequacy of our piety,
breaking our illusions about our righteousness,
unraveling our doctrines,
shaking us out of our safe complacencies,
asking us to ask ourselves if we indeed
have got it RIGHT.

I imagine if this man with the unclean spirit shouted out among us this morning
he would be firmly, if politely, escorted from the building...

For you see, 21 centuries later,
we are just as determined as the scribes and Pharisees
to define who belongs and who does not,
 who is acceptable and who is not,
 what rules one must follow to be in good with God,
 what worship is worthy, what righteousness is right enough.

Twenty-one centuries later, we are just as determined
 to ensure that we have got it RIGHT.

What brought you to worship this morning?
Did you come to see your friends, sing a few songs,
 hear a comforting word,
 and gather enough reinforcement
 to resume your life on Monday morning?
Or did you come expecting Jesus to show up?

Because let me tell you, when Jesus shows up,
 all hell breaks loose.
 He overturns the tables.
 He breaks the Sabbath.
 He disrupts the assumed order of things.

And Jesus redefines holiness to be not what we expect at all...
 not that which is set apart and orthodox and pure,
 but that which reaches out to embrace the unclean,
 to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.

Jesus reaches out to stretch our minds and grow our hearts and save our souls.
Jesus comes to set us free from all the demons that enslave, distort and bind our lives.
Someone once said that if we really came to worship expecting Jesus to show up,
 we'd all be wearing hardhats.

On that day in the house of worship,

most of the congregation came away satisfied they'd heard a great sermon.

Only one man left having been transformed. Only one man left having been made whole.

Only one man recognized the Holy One of God.

And that was the man who asked the question I think we all should ask...

—do we dare to ask?—

What might happen if we ask.....

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?