

January 29, 2012

Mark 1:21-28

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‘Whose Authority?’

In the realm of television entertainment, reality programming has become exceedingly popular over the last, probably, ten years. American Idol (and now, almost ready for air, the Canadian version of same) is an example is that.

Just starting into a new season, the budding stars of tomorrow are in the process of auditioning, with dreams of going to Hollywood to ‘make it big’ as they say. So-in the beginning stages, we, the audience, get to hear the good and the bad. If you are like me at all, I can hardly watch at this point because some of the bad ones are down right awful-and when they are turned down or they are criticized-I feel so bad for them...don’t you?

What becomes apparent, very quickly in this kind of ‘talent search’ - what you realize very fast is that, in truth, very few of the singers actually stand out at all. Yes, there are lots of people who can carry a tune but it is rare that someone opens their mouth to sing and everyone turns their ear to them.

But you know, much of our living is just like that. Much of what goes on day to day is just regular kind of stuff; we wake up, put our feet on the floor; get ready for the day ahead; get the kids ready for school- all that ‘stuff’. Because of the ‘regular day as usual’ kind of events, we end up filtering a lot out- sometimes to the point where we might miss out on some important things. But once in a while it happens that someone or something captures our attention, enough to have us truly paying attention.

...and let's face it; there is a lot of blah, blah, blah, in our contemporary world. This Information Age of which we are part bombards us with messages-constantly. And we, like modern-day versions of the multi-armed Vishnu-try to hold our technologies around us so that we miss nothing.

I came upon, what I believe has become, for many of us, our 'way of being' in this modern age over the Christmas break, right in my own family room. Three boys sitting on couch and chairs...there's a movie playing on the television- each of them have a lap-top, in their laps-and two of them are also on the their phones...It is a new way of being, most definitely...but do we not long for the 'authentic' still, amidst all the blah, blah, blah.?

So, Jesus and his disciples make their way to Capernaum and when it is Sabbath they head to the local synagogue.

The pulpit would be open to those gathered to read from Torah and then make comment and invite conversation and debate. Being a community synagogue, the sanctuary would be filled with the same men that are always there. They would know each other very well- used to hearing the sound of each other's voices; they knew each other's biases- favourite topics-foibles and the like. Same old-same old...blah, blah, blah...

Nevertheless, what brings them to synagogue is the distinct call of God in their lives; they are used to this rhythm and most of them would be at temple daily for study and prayer. For devout, orthodox Jews in our time, (today) the same still holds true.

So, in his turn, Jesus ascends the pulpit area-smoothes out the scroll in front of him and begins to read from scripture.

Perhaps those who were in their own heads and hearts-praying and swaying might have wondered at this new voice among them and opened up an eye to see. And when Jesus began to teach- well, then- a few more would be taking notice and then, (as Jesus proceeded) all of them would be sitting up straight, astounded that this young stranger before them could speak with such authority.

That may have been enough excitement for the day- it's not every day someone stands out so definitively at temple-giving them new insight-new depth of thought and consideration..inspiring, really. But, as it turned out, Jesus' teaching was only the opener.

When the fellow at the back of the synagogue jumped up and began screaming at Jesus, we might imagine the response of those gathered (first, turning around to see who was at the back) -trying to get out of the way as Jesus leaves the pulpit to make his way over to him...identifying yet another voice among them-the voice that tears down-spewing up from within the man-and Jesus is telling it to be silent-to come out.

It is an interesting thing about scripture-how it can reach out from its antiquity and speak to us where we live.

Jesus in the synagogue with whom scripture calls 'the man with the unclean spirit' is not simply a quaint bible story from the past...this 'voice' that is identified here is a voice we are all familiar with because we have heard it many times in our personal lives and in the life of our communities and certainly in our church communities.

It's the voice that goes for the jugular every time-spitting and hissing its venom so that everyone who stands near is in danger of being touched by it. It takes strength, authority and authenticity to match its strength to overcome it-transforming its negative influence into the positive-transforming it into a voice that builds up and supports.

We know this voice...Its presence creates fear, stress and anxiety-(for some, it is the voice of a disapproving parent-for others, some other in authority that always made them feel , less-than).

Those men present in the synagogue that day-if they were honest later on in the day when telling their families about it-if they were honest at all, they would have talked about how afraid it made them-but that there was this man-and when he spoke there was calm- there was

authority that transformed that poor fellow who was tormented by a ‘so-called’ unclean spirit-and turned him-quieted him and brought him back to himself.

For every person who left the synagogue that day-a story most assuredly went with them, to be told again and again-that they would return to in time when everyone was looking back at Jesus’ extraordinary life...and these were among just the first days of Jesus’ public ministry...

You know, there’s a brand of mustard out of Northern Michigan-Bech’s mustard- marketed as the ‘mustard with authority!’ You gotta love that. Mustard with authority-can you imagine? And yet- we kind of know what they mean-a mustard that makes you sit up and take notice; that has a sting to it; that you’ll remember, and appreciate, even as your eyes and tongue are smarting.

The gospel passages for today are just like that-the kind of authority in the faith community –authority that startles and astonishes us sometimes, both because it’s neither whingeing or equivocating or arbitrary or bossy. It is an authority that reflects that of the One who has delegated it...(revgalblogpals)

So, in the usual blah, blah, blah nature of our day to day, we might want to be scanning the airwaves for notable voices-instead of filling up that space with white noise-to become more aware of spirit-sounds that invite us along the pathway to further our faith journey.

At the bottom of it all is God’s intention for us in creation- that we stand in a healthy relationship with God-following in the way of Jesus- so that we may stand side by side in relationship with each other and with the world. Amen.

