

**Healing and Authority**  
**Epiphany 4 January 28, 2024**

Good morning to you, the Faithful, the Faithful of St. Gabriel's community, on the day of our Annual Meeting.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany includes the collect to fit this day, and also so well fits the world, including our election season. Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth; *Mercifully* hear the supplications of your people, and in *our time* grant us *your peace*; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

It is always good to hear some things twice – and consider highlights of these readings, psalms/songs, as we 'get to' and **FIND** the GOOD NEWS.

In today's Deuteronomy reading Moses speaks for God giving us information **and warning**.....I hear an undertone of 'beware'.....**only truth** will work.... And then, the punchline.....last line. If it is not the Way, the Truth:

-that prophet will die.

No wonder we needed the resurrection.... No wonder there were so many witnesses to the resurrection. The Way, the Truth and the Life.

So, I am now ready for the psalm, which we say together or responsively. Today, I requested the reader ask us all to join in together, a resounding praise to God, led in unison.

That was fun! And different...

However, I am not going to say too much about Corinthians and red meat, at least not from this place/position/pulpit.

Rather, I prefer to stress the dramatic healing passage, with its many interpretations and applications:

What is this? Toward the end, when the unclean 'came out of him,' we hear 'What is this?'

First, they were astounded at his teaching...., for he taught them as one having **authority**,(voice up) and not(*just*) as the scribes. (voice lowered/*scornful*). NOW they were AMAZED. Go Jesus. Astounding...amazed...

'What is this?'

First chapter of Mark, and Jesus is just getting warmed up.

Well, in all fairness, this is a prophet, this is Jesus, this is one who will not die. Meet the Great healer, the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace.

Yup. Spread the word.... spread the word. A strength like no other, a love like nothing ever.

Folks, I have always found it interesting how few priests address these healing passages directly – my experience is that they sort of defer.... Try to go elsewhere in the readings, or get so vague - I used to wonder why. I asked a few priests and got a meek or rather embarrassed expression – perhaps some humor. I did listen to their answers and appreciated the discussion. Recently I found a Cartoonist guide to the Bible written by a very creative priest, who in addition to giving visual perspective with drawings, manages to liven up many passages in all the gospels. Another professional artist, Jay Sidebotham, whose humor is akin to some of Fr. Andrew's cartoons 'on the Lighter Side' which we find at the end of our Messenger Newsletter. This artist is one of the contributors to Forward Movement, those small pocket size booklets many rely on for daily devotions. These creative people grapple with some of the deep, deep, messages of the and make them fun and memorable.

Mark's passage today is particularly fun if you read it as if you are in the crowd, and see before your eyes a miracle. A shocking, disarming, wild miracle.

To put a bit of perspective on why these passages are especially weird for us, in our modern-day world, where we look askance at Voo-doo dolls, I would like to make this point. *My mother-in-law used to say regarding her thyroid pill – how can I complain, I just have to take this little white pill. As a biology researcher, she appreciated the benefits of modern medicine. Modern medicine which has taken on the main role of healing in **our** society, even though not so much in poor-er countries... where little white thyroid pills might be harder to obtain. So we pray and hope and send money for good works while we wait for the whole world to be free – don't we.... We are waiting for God to have the whole world in his hand, (he's got the whole world in his hand – sing.. the little bitty baby.....) and have doctors and nurses, midwives and technicians, social workers and special equipment makers – all in God's hands.*

With this perspective of what we are waiting for, the passage does not seem so far-fetched, does it? In Epiphany we are considering week after week how God is Manifest in our lives and in the world.

Mark does not tell us how the 'man with an unclean spirit' reacted does he? – or what the spirit looked like, does he? This unclean spirit has an unending list of ways it might be hurting, damaging; the many ways are infinite.

The Order of St. Luke is an ecumenical group who study healing and pray for people. They offer workshops. To become a member, one of the criteria is to study 28 stories of Jesus' healing in the bible. The passages are examined to evaluate the social situation, how Jesus enters the story, who is with him, what clues we have about the 'goings on' during the story, and how the passage ends.

Whereas I tried to read this Gospel today with a bit of fervor to get you in the swing of it, basically, Jesus was with his disciples on the Sabbath, the day of rest. Jesus' teaching was powerful. There is that dig about those who were JUST 'scribes' (not teaching as well as Jesus). Then disruption occurs – and it is loud and scary. One man refers to an unseen group. And,

somehow, ‘they’ recognized Jesus!!!!. Jesus obviously understood and recognized them. Remember, ALL are included – warts and all, as Fr. Andrew said the other week. Jesus quieted the noisy spirit(s), while the crowd watched the man convulsed. There is the cartoon – what came out when the man convulsed.

The passage ends – folks are shocked and spread the word.

The following verses are about Jesus healing many in various ways. Chapter 1 in Mark – just wait, listen, observe. There is more to come – and, of course, in Mark it comes quickly, with great haste. A LOT of preaching and teaching.

I hesitate to give 2 ‘real life examples’ – but they too, of course, can be quick.

The first one is rather simple. I was about 18 or so. I was teaching skiing in New Hampshire. I was definitely not the best skier but very glad to have this job for a week right after Christmas. They did not give me the very beginner skiers to teach because of all the gadgets, and boots to put on; my group was past that. Thank God. They did, however, ask me to help with kids having some sort of trouble. For instance a teenage girl got scared to come out of the cabin and join her class. We could not leave her alone in the cabin. I thought, oh dear, hurry up, Midge. Figure this out. I went in the cabin, called her name, and said I was there. I told her I thought I might understand her fear because I was the worst skier of all the teachers and just lucky to be there. What happened was ridiculously easy. I never understood why she made it so easy. I do not even fully recollect what her fear was. .... I think God might have been helping me in addition to her. My thanks to God and a story of amazement is one I tell to this day. That girl was a ‘tipping point’ for me. She gave me confidence. Within this story are so many other details that make this a story one that I might tell for other reasons. For instance, my brother, who was a fabulous skier, had to teach me the very basics before this week, so I could teach my class. It did not snow. Then it finally did with one day to spare. I had to learn fast; Bill had to be very demanding to get the task accomplished.

This next story is a little more serious, and surely more ‘public.’ I hope that one of these stories gets you thinking of Jesus helping you to have helped someone at some point in your life – or perhaps to give you the courage to do so tomorrow.

This is about a 5<sup>th</sup> grade boy in an elementary school in the waiting room outside the principal’s office. I get a call, saying, please come. So I did. Walk down the hall. Enter. I am tall, you have noticed, I was young, and relatively new as a guidance counselor, but thank God, I had been a camp counselor for years. And I love kids. A 110-pounder is curled up on the couch in the corner – in a ball- (demo) – fetal position. I can not see his face. I look at the principal and he looks at me – no words necessary. My eyes dash side to side, checking what else is around. I have NO IDEA of anything that happened before this. Just, ‘please, come to the office, we have a problem’. As I walk in, with a prayer in my heart, I say a moderately cheerful hello to the administrative assistant, in those days, the secretary, a wonderful woman. My hand goes up to brush away any further conversation after the greeting. **Everyone is staring.** I do not know what made this happen, but I can, in retrospect, give credit to the girl at ski camp and thanks to God. I bent over the curled-up child and whispered in his ear. I told him something about my not

knowing what had happened, but I was sorry. Would he like to come down the hall with me. He stood up and followed me silently down the hall. Then, he told me his side of the story...which took a while.

Jesus gives us strength and power. We act in love. We face fear, awkwardness, tough decisions, physical pain, discouragement, and on and on. The power of our prayers for each other and the strength we receive is immeasurable and beyond comprehension. Jesus loves me; and you, and you, and you. The Bible told me so.