

Lord of Love, let your teachings be on our lips, and in our hearts, that we may know your authority in our lives. In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Inspirer. Amen.

They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority!

Jesus was teaching didactically, and by example. He taught them "as one having authority, and not as the scribes"—Mark, along with Deuteronomy and 1 Corinthians, are each examples of instruction to people of faith in a particular place and time. Later in Deuteronomy, the ancient Israelites were reminded not to cut down fruit trees, with the question "Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?" I love the image of laying siege to a tree... it could be a long siege if one was camping out, waiting for a tree to run out of water, or food—waiting for it to surrender.

Sometimes I think we can have a misplaced sense of our enemy—even in our story from Mark today Jesus's display of authority clearly separates the "unclean spirit" from the person. The unclean spirit is contained, cast out. The person is protected, rehabilitated. Sometimes when I am corrected I have to remind myself that I am not my thoughts, or my writings, or even my beliefs. Correction does not have to involve an ego-death and resurrection. Of course, I'll have to let you know the first time it doesn't feel that way--☺ it hasn't happened yet.

At times I think even the words "unclean spirit" can prevent us from thinking in anything other than exclusively "churchy" terms. I wonder if the story could just as easily have been about an unhealthy habit that had become addictive, and had taken possession of that person's life—so that they lost their ability to act freely as a result of the influence of drugs, alcohol, video games, distorted body image, or violence. Any number of things can disconnect us, and cause us to lose control of the ability to make life-giving choices for ourselves and those close to us. Maybe it's just a feeling of inadequacy, resentment, dependence, or resignation that separates us from God. What would it mean to hear the call to repent as a call to be free from a mindset of impossibility, scarcity, or fear?

Wherever we are, our framing of reality matters. Many articles and studies have written about the benefits of regularly writing and rewriting our own story, to process the events in our life, and reframe them. However, I think prayer can be even more powerful, to let the light of God's love shine on our story as we retell it in worship, individually and in community.

We are continually invited to give ourselves over to God in community, to recognize that we are not our own Savior. None of us is called to be the Savior on our own. We are called to receive and be the Body of Christ together.

Jesus calls us to follow him, and in following him, to be like him, and to accomplish the deeds he did in his earthly ministry, as a fellow human with a gift for healing. We all are

limited in our humanity, and yet, together we can live into moments of transcendence and wholeness.

Our capital campaign is about making a space for all in this house of worship. The question came up at our Vestry Retreat on Friday and Saturday: How can we be better about inclusion here and now, while we work towards making our Nave a more physically accessible space? We are all limited as fallen individuals in a broken world. But how can we make our service more accessible to those with a more visible physical limitation? How can we be more welcoming to those who have experienced marginalization in society, or even in the church, whether due to sexuality, gender, race, or age? What more can we do to celebrate the beautiful diversity of our various backgrounds and perspectives here and now?

I wonder how our welcome of the “other”—the person who is not like us, who we might see as completely different from us— I wonder how our welcome of that person in our shared worship life, could help us to see the face of Christ in every person?

In Jesus’ command for the unclean spirit to depart, I see him showing us a different way that we can be in prayerful connection with one another and with the source of abundant life, refusing that which is not of God, and honoring our common humanity. In prayer we are wrapped in a beautiful, colorful lovingkindness, like that of a warm knit shawl, surrounding us and joining us to the source of all life. In prayer we are empowered to face the cold air outside, to pursue truth, justice, and love.

The word for prayer in the Hebrew Bible, “Tefilah,” comes from the word for judgment, used in a reflexive form. A self-judging approach to prayer and faith is precisely the kind of thoughtful wrestling with ourselves and with God that we seek as Episcopalians, engaged in living out our faith. It is an appropriate word describing our prayers as a fruitful time for self-evaluation. If I am being honest about bringing my thanksgivings, praise, confessions, and requests to the Creator of the universe, I cannot help but feel a sense of my own smallness in contrast to the greatness of God’s grace and generosity. I don’t always get what I want, and life is certainly not always easy. But prayer helps me remember that God is our companion, God is with us in all our experiences of challenge.

Living in the power of love involves both risk and pain. If I am not willing to stretch and risk the vulnerability of love and care for another, I might seek to numb my own emotions, or try to protect myself from any form of disappointment through a sense of false apathy. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ words on the cross are the power of Christ: “Forgive them for they know not what they do”. John’s Gospel gives us the story of Jesus telling doubting Thomas to “reach out your hand and put it in my side”. In other words, am I willing to feel where Christ has been hurt? Are we?

Toward the end of Mark, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James are told to tell Peter and the other disciples that “he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him, just as he told you”—they are told to go back to the beginning, to follow Christ in Christ’s power as it was displayed in stories like the one we heard today, of Jesus in Capernaum, in Galilee. This is where we are called to return in our discipleship. Indeed, the title of a recent document on race and reconciliation in the Diocese is “Meet me in Galilee”— the incredible

Lyn Crawford is a co-chair of the committee. We are invited to meet the Risen Christ in this work.

Some versions of Mark don't go much beyond the two women fleeing the tomb and being too afraid to tell anyone the news of the Risen Christ. If we take ourselves too seriously we might miss the narrative irony here.

Its almost as if I were to say, "the women ran away in fear back to Galilee and decided they would rather not start a movement because they didn't think it would amount to much of anything."

Or, that George Washington crossed a small river called the Delaware and founded a country no one has ever heard of.

Oh if only Deuteronomy had promised us a prophet like Moses to follow him—one who spoke and enacted truth and love in the name of the Lord!!

If only a gifted preacher, theologian, and writer had shared the Good News with all the various people groups scattered across the Mediterranean in the first century.

If only we had an Advocate, a Mediator who is with us and for us, beside us to refute our every accuser! If only we had a Spirit of love to be Guide, and our Comforter, as close to us as our every breath. If only we had a spiritual Parent, our provider, the source of every good act through every generous person.

If only we could take bold action together toward making a space for all, here, in this place.

Amen.