

Mark 1: 21-28 "I Know Who You Are" Rev. Janet Chapman 1/28/18

*(in character as a synagogue bystander)* I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember

it because it was the year everybody was on nerves about politics, about how much they might have to pay in taxes, not sure who to trust or not, and to top it off, there was this horrible flu being passed from household to household. Folks were scared of getting sick which made everybody grumpier and on edge. On this particular day, we were all headed to worship because it was the sabbath. Some people were coming in rather sleepily, maybe not having gotten a lot of sleep the night before, or being worn out from a busy week. Still others trekked in worried about whether they had enough food for the guests coming over after worship. Others arrived having just bickered with their children to hurry up and get ready. "We're going to God's house, so for God's sake, shape up! You don't want people to think you're heathens, do you?" From various paths, emerging from a variety of experiences during the week gone by, swamped in vast number of emotions and mental states, we came. We came because, among other things, it was our duty to do so. For as long as any of us could remember, we Jews in Capernaum had gone to synagogue on the Sabbath – it was just expected of us, it was the thing to do. On sabbath, you went to synagogue – the men sat up front, the women like myself were in the back, which actually proved to be the best place to see anything out of the ordinary. On sabbath, you went to synagogue and you moved your way through the fairly staid and predictable liturgy, listened as the scribes read a portion of the Torah, sang a hallel doxology, and then you went home for the feast day meal at noon.

But on this particular morning, I remember it well because Jesus of Nazareth was there. His presence created a worship service no would ever forget. This Jesus stood up as some kind of guest rabbi and few, if any of us, had ever heard of him before. Some of my friends smirked

when they heard he was from Nazareth; I groaned a bit inwardly, after all, nothing good ever seemed to come out of Nazareth. But then he started to teach, and although he was no John the Baptist full of drama and theatrics, there was something unusual about him. All of us had witnessed John in action with his arm-waving, fire and brimstone rhetoric and when John got to preaching, no one fell asleep. My neighbor leaned over and whispered to me, “I sure wish that John were here today; I could sure use a pick-me-up.” I shh’ed her and said, “The least we can do is give this guy from Nazareth a chance.”

So this Jesus began to talk about the scriptures and there was something striking about his whole demeanor. It wasn’t just that his ideas and vocabulary were fresh and innovative, and it wasn’t just that he turned out to be a better speaker than we had first guessed. There was something in the very presence of this man that made you want to sit up a bit straighter, to be a bit kinder even to the most annoying of synagogue attenders, it made me want to get closer to where he was standing, so much so that if it hadn’t been for my friend dragging me down, I probably would have moved right up to sit front and center with the men. I noted that even some of the older children around us, who had worked so hard at perfecting that bored, apathetic look on their faces, couldn’t help perking up, slouching a bit less and listening more closely than they’d care to admit. This man had authority. He had a moral gravity, a weightiness and substance to him that I find hard to explain. Somehow, I got this sense that this man and the message he shared about God’s kingdom were one and the same. His impact had nothing to do with institutional diplomas or golden crowns – it didn’t stem from being among the select few allowed to read the scriptures or having more training than any of the rest of us. It wasn’t because he had done his homework or practiced his sermon or was able to

preach with notes or without stuttering. No, this man was the very message he was proclaiming. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but this man packed a wallop just by virtue of being there at all.

A few of the women as well as the men up front were beginning to whisper their amazement, while others jotted down an impressive "Wow" on their scroll and showed it to the person next to them. Just as we were realizing something extraordinary was happening, this horrifying scream came from the back row. It was like a dog that had been run over by a chariot but wasn't near dead, just terribly hurt. In the midst of the high-pitched screeching, we could pick out the words. "WHHHHAAAAAT do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?! Have you come to do away with us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Well, that certainly didn't happen every day in worship. "I know who you are," said the voice. What did this guy mean he knew who this man was? Even the priests and scribes didn't seem to know who he was, how was it this crazy, screaming maniac knew? Immediately, Jesus yelled, "Be quiet" to him. It was a good thing he did because we all were thinking it on the inside, and then Jesus said something no one saw coming. He said, "Come out of him!" No sooner had he done so and the man began convulsing, like a seizure or something. He shook like a leaf then he fell limp on the ground. Not more than a few seconds later, he lifted his head up and this look of calm came over him. The fire had gone out of his eyes and he seemed better. At that precise moment, however, he was the only calm-looking one in the whole place. The rest of us were scraping our jaws off the floor! This really didn't happen every week in worship, let me tell you. By this late in worship on a typical Sabbath, most folks are usually beginning to drift to other topics in their minds, like will they get home in time to take the roast out of the oven or is little

Martin behaving himself in the classroom next door. But not on that day! No one had drifted off in their minds to the mundane or the typical – all of us were focused on one central question – who is this guy? Who is this dude who commands such authority even over demons? Who is this one that isn't restricted by boundaries, isn't limited by finite understandings of health and healing?

I have often heard it said, "What you do reveals who you are." This Jesus breaks through the boundaries of expectations and protocol. His actions reveal his true core and he has the ability to see beneath what the rest of us see. How did he know that there was someone healthy deep inside that maniac? What was this? How could he see past the obvious to the extraordinary? This Jesus is an exorcist; he is a practitioner of healing and he seems to be teaching us a new understanding of what it means to worship God. Worship had never been like this before – the morning had started out like any other typical sabbath, but then this guy whom the unclean spirit called Holy One of God shows up. As witnesses of this unusual event, we were pretty sure the unclean spirit was right – we were in the presence of holiness. As worship drew to a close, I knew we would never be the same again. As we were leaving the temple, I pushed my way through the crowd to draw closer to Jesus. I don't know how it happened but he turned and looked straight at me, and I was aware that here was one capable of knowing more than just the surface of a person, here was one able to know me for who I really was, warts and all. Suddenly I felt a kinship with the demon-possessed man from the temple, for we all have our demons inside of us – some are just more visible than others. This Holy One of God was somehow able to peer deep into my core, to peel away the surface, and to say to me "I know who you are." And that didn't scare me – you would think it would.

Instead it was comforting, it was filled with promise. At that moment, my mission was clear and I knew that mission would be inextricably linked to this Holy One; no cold would hold power over my heart, no deluge would dampen my purpose. For in that moment, I knew I was truly alive.