



Sunday January 31, 2021

Pastor Christian Marien

Mark 1:21-28 (Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

In our home, we have a relatively large kitchen sink. It has two bowls – which I learned is how kitchen sinks are described. Our kitchen sink has two bowls. Plenty of space for dirty dishes on one side and clean dishes on the other. At least that is how I assume a kitchen sink with two bowls should work. As our two oldest children have been in the hybrid school schedule, I have come to figure out that our kitchen sink is not large enough. Especially when the one bowl with dirty dishes never transfers any dishes to the clean side. Over these past months, breakfast dishes and lunch dishes and snack dishes just seemed to pile up after each round of eating by my high school and junior high children. I am not mentioning their names to protect the innocent (or at least to pretend to protect the innocent). But lo and behold, this past week as my two oldest children went back to school full-time, a miracle took place. Our kitchen sink expanded. It grew. So much so that my wife and I are now embarrassed for the size of our sink because now we cannot even see the dirty dishes because they do not exist anymore. Imagine my surprise that sending our older children back to school full-time would produce the miracle of the expanding sink.

Today, starts off with the very first miracle Jesus offers the world as Mark records the story for us. At the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus enters on the sabbath and is confronted by a man with an unclean spirit, a demon for those of us less concerned with political correctness. *“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One God.”* This demon wastes no time in confronting Jesus – believing he has power enough to challenge 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 with a loud voice, came out of the man.* It may not be a spectacular miracle for many of us but to the people gathered for church that day and, especially to the man who was healed, this first miracle of Jesus in the book of Mark is a bright light of hope amidst the shadows of this life.

We are not called to be fearful, we are called to love, writes one author. We are not called to be perfect; we are called to be faithful. We are not called to be fearless; we are called to be obedient. We are not called to be all-knowing; we are called to believe. We are not called to claim, we are called to give. We are not called to be victorious; we are called to be courageous. We are not called to lord it over others; we are called to serve. What is this? Echoing the words of the villager—a new teaching—with authority. He commands even the unclean spirit and they obey him. A new teaching and even though the people are amazed, we know how long their amazement lasts. Just long enough to hang Jesus on the cross.

A sick man went to the doctor’s office with his wife. The doctor examined the man and ran some tests while his wife waited in the reception area. When the doctor emerged with a concerned look on his face, the wife became anxious. “Doctor, will my husband be okay?” she inquired. “I’m afraid your husband is very ill,” the doctor replied. “He has a rare form of anemia, and if it is left untreated, he will most certainly die from it. However, there is a cure.” “A cure?” “Yes, with rest and proper nutrition, the disease will go into remission and your husband should live for many more years. Here’s what I want you to do: Take your husband home and treat him like a king. Fix him three home-cooked meals a day and wait on him hand and foot. Bring him breakfast in bed. Don’t let him do anything that you can do for him. If he needs something, you take care of it. Give him a back rub in the morning and a full body massage every evening. Oh, and one more thing. Because his immune system is weak, you’ll need to keep your home spotless at all times. Do you have any questions?” The wife had none. “Do you want to break the news to your husband or shall I?” asked the doctor. “I will,” the wife replied.



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She walked into the examination room. The husband sensing that something was wrong, said, “It’s bad, isn’t it? What have I got?” His wife answered with a tear in her eye, “The doctor said you’re gonna die.”

We may hear the call of God. We may understand and even venture into the first steps of a new direction. Yet, oftentimes, something holds us back or changes our direction. I gathered with a family two Saturdays ago to baptize a bright-eyed little girl named Evelyn. It was a day of great rejoicing not only because of Evelyn’s presence but because the Lord, who calls us each by name, has called Evelyn by name. This past week, I happened to be reading a book about baptism and one of the prayers went like this—May she guard the gift of your Holy Spirit. May she always remember the mark of Christ placed on her forehead. May she live in the joy of your presence. And may she always walk in the path of your light. We do not know where Evelyn’s path will lead her. Honestly, are any of us confident in knowing the direction of the path God lays before us? We do not know how much sleep Evelyn’s parents have or have not had in this last year as they began a new chapter of their life with this gift of God. We can only imagine the life Evelyn will have in the years before her. And so, we wait to see where God will lead this little life—this little light now shining for all the world to see. She does not wear a nametag on her chest—instead, this day, Evelyn wears the mark of Christ on her forehead. And someday she will go into all the world with that cross going before her. Some days will be easy, and others will be incredibly painful—and yet through it all God in Jesus Christ promises to go with her – just as God promises to go with each of us. Through the very best days and the days that drop us to our knees – God is with us. How I have needed that reminder through these last long months.

So for Evelyn and each of us, a reminder of God’s promise made at our baptism in this blessing by Jan Richardson:

*There is so much I want to say, as if the saying could prepare you for this path, as if there were anything I could offer that would make your way less circuitous, more smooth. Once you step out, you will see for yourself how nothing could have made you ready for this road that will take you from what you know to what you cannot perceive except, perhaps, in your dreaming or as it gives a glimpse in prayer. But I can tell you this journey is not about miles. It is not about how far you can walk or how fast. It is about what you will do with this moment, this star that blazes in your sky though no one else might see. So open your heart to these shimmering hours by which your path is made. Open your eyes to the light that shines on what you will need to see. Open your hands to those who go with you, those seen and those known only by their blessing, their benediction of the road that is your own.*

People of God. Be at peace. God is with you. Have courage. You are loved. Thanks be to God. Amen.