

WHEN JESUS COMES TO CHURCH

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if Jesus attended Centennial some Sunday?

It is not out of the realm that He could walk through our double doors. **What kind of hospitality would we offer?** Should it not look like that every Sunday as if that person coming through the door is Jesus, because Jesus welcomed every one and as a disciple should we do any less? I imagine a thought might go something like this “I remember him or her and I did not like them the time they were here before!!!

Memories can be a good thing, but there are times when they are a roadblock to us for reaching out with the love and a non-judging attitude like our Lord had. Mom used to say and I can hear the words in my ear – *“judge not lest you be judged”*. I don’t know how many times that has come back on me. God is funny that way. His patience is endless, but he can keep bringing up the same lesson to learn over and over and over again!

Mark, in his Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to encourage those who were having a tough time day after day. Mark unlike Matthew did not take the time to prove Jesus’ lineage. Mark just jumped right into Jesus’ ministry.

There are valuable lessons to be learned from Mark’s gospel for us today. In today’s story Jesus is in the synagogue and events take place that could answer the question – what would happen if Jesus came to Centennial this morning?

A question that I continue to ask myself and maybe you do too is – **“would I recognize Him when Jesus came to church?”** We all have this picture in our minds and memories of what He would look like. **Would He look like the picture hanging in narthex, or maybe like the famous side view of His profile?** More than likely none of us have it exactly right. However for some His looks may be important, but what He says and He would do is much, much more important.

In the synagogue that day the thing that drew people’s attention – was His words and the authority with which He spoke to the people assembled. In Verse 22 we are told they were “amazed” at His teaching for He was teaching as one having authority.

The Greek word for “amazed” here carries a strong meaning of not just amazed and impressed, but overwhelmed. Jesus was not just quoting statements of previous Scribes as was the case with the current Scribes when the scriptures were studied in the synagogue. A comparison might be the carefully worded statements we hear from politicians today – for most using a volume of words

yet saying nothing. This was Jesus' effect on those in the synagogue, like a fresh and new breeze His words carried authority, not the worn out pronouncements of the Scribes.

Today when we read the Bible the Holy Spirit within gives to us a fresh and new meaning to words we have read over and over again. That is the mystery of our faith – how words written by men, inspired by God, well over a thousand years ago can have meaning and answers to us in a very different world today.

When Jesus comes to church He teaches us. I have just mentioned how the word should come alive for us – **today**. After all it is the Living Word and for me living means “action”, doing, affecting in some way.

People who study the subject of authority speak of two types – *one that comes from outside ourselves, but the second type of authority comes from within us*. This type of authority is how Jesus taught that day in the synagogue. Think of some of the great orators, speakers of the past. One comes to mind since we just marked his birthday, Martin Luther King.

I have had the joy of reading one of his speeches known as “the Street Sweeper’s Speech”. King talked in the speech about the high calling of work, no matter what you did and to be the very best you can do in that work. Martin Luther King heavily quoted the scripture after all he was the Reverend Martin Luther King and his source, authority was the Bible. However, I don’t believe if we could have been in that synagogue that day anything would compare to when Jesus spoke and taught with authority that came from within!

As we have gathered here for worship, Jesus is here in our praise and the words of the Holy Scriptures. Remember “*where two or three are gathered I am in their midst*”. Jesus has come to our church today! When we let the words of Jesus from scripture “sink in”, it can be amazing and overwhelming for us! You know, sometimes when singing a song the words can bring tears. For when we begin to look at the world and people around us through His eyes and His compassion, your life will not ever be the same. What is really good is that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will continue to teach and support us each and every day!

When Jesus comes to church he carries an announcement that the kingdom of God has arrived and to believe because God is in the flesh through Jesus Christ. You ask what really is the Kingdom of God? God broke into our world to show us the way things should be, not to be satisfied the way things are. If we follow “kingdom principles” individuals will be better for it and so will the world. But, the world is such a mess!!!! Why??? God when He created us did not make us

robots He gave us something called “free will”. He gave us the ability to make a choice, and when we do decide to follow Jesus and apply “kingdom principles” the results cannot be denied.

We need to put our faith where our mouth is and not just talk about it and wring our hands with what is wrong. We need to live those kingdom principles each and every day. Will we see change right away, no? After all we didn’t get where we are today overnight. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we can change and change lives around us.

When Jesus comes to church he calls us, each and every one. We are gifted by God with a special gift to function in the body of Christ. Just before today’s reading in Mark, Verse 17 when calling the disciples Jesus says *“follow Me, I will make you become fishers of men”*. How many people in church when called to function in the body say “I can’t do that!” “No way can I ever do that!” Well, to a point they are right, “they” can’t but with God’s help anything is possible. It is said of us who are older, get grouchy and negative. But age does not have anything to do with it.

The truth is an older person who is negative and grouchy has been that way all their life. You just don’t flip a switch and become negative or grouchy overnight. Countless numbers of people in churches have been contributing members ‘til the day they leave this earth! I have sighted examples of people who have done things in their later years, and I will say that many if not all had a strong faith in God and heard His call on their life to do things.

There is an interesting event in today’s reading. A man with an unclean spirit approaches Jesus wondering what Jesus has to do with them, being the unclean spirit. Now some may wave off this encounter, as people at that time did not understand illness and explained it with demons and the like. The spiritual world is real and not some Hollywood invention. We in the western culture tend to dismiss the spiritual as something ignorant people use because they cannot explain it.

Evil is in the world and history proves such. After all before Satan fell from the heavens because of pride he worshiped God. In our story the spirits within this man knew exactly who Jesus was – the Son of God!

The devil lurks around church not to pray but looks for prey. In 1 Peter 5:8 *“stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”* And we are told in 2 Corinthians 11:14 *“even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”*

We are told to be on guard because the devil is looking for a weakness to get in the door. Churches have not been destroyed from the outside but torn apart from inside when pride, anger, jealousy, and bitterness are used by the devil to divide and harbor un-forgiveness within us.

In our story there are a few things to notice that may not be clearly spelled out. One is that Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In fact when He arrived in town we are told they **immediately** went to the synagogue. From this we can assume it is important to gather together as a body of Christ. Two, is that Jesus did this regularly as we can recall a number of stories in the Gospels center around Jesus in the synagogue or temple. Third, Jesus taught in the house of God, the synagogue. We may not all be teachers, but we are all learners.

When we gather Jesus is here searching for open hearts, an open heart that is willing to follow God. **When Jesus is here He is searching for open minds**, remember Romans 12:2 about transforming of our mind. **It cannot be transformed if we have a closed mind! The same can be said that we must have an open door when Jesus comes to church or He will not force himself in.** If any people are reminded of an open door we are with the picture in the narthex showing Jesus standing at the door and knocking waiting for us to invite him in. Revelation 3:20 *"here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me."*

Just like on the road to Emmaus that Easter Sunday morning when the two disciples were opened to the Scriptures and all that had happened. We need to keep a heart open to God and to share our heart with others. We need to keep an open mind for understanding with the help of the Holy Spirit. We need to keep our door open so we can hear God's call for our church and for us as members of the body of Christ.

When Jesus comes to church, people will be amazed by His words.

When Jesus comes to church, people will be changed by the work of Jesus in their life.

When Jesus comes to church, people who hear His call will and go tell of Him.

Amen.

