

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany + February 3, 2024 + "Who's in Charge Here?" + Mark 1:29-39

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+++Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen

Dear Friends in Christ; The title of our message for today is "Who's in Charge Here?" based on our Gospel lesson of Jesus' words from Mark 1:23: *"Let us go on to the next town, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."*

This is a busy time of the year, with a new year underway, it's already February! It is the Epiphany season when we learn from the wonderful book of Mark how active Jesus was as He began His ministry. He began with new disciples, teaching and healing from village to village, always on the go, with no home base! But sadly what's really going on in our busy lives is often far from Epiphany. We've been shoveling, fighting the cold, the fog, and puddles, hearing about presidential candidates and next week getting ready for the Super Bowl with an estimated 120 million fans. How can we have time for this season with the strange title, Epiphany?

Actually, Epiphany, the season of LIGHT fits in very well with our current culture. Like football and politics this season of Epiphany is about **leadership**, about who's in charge of our lives. Our lessons for today emphasize this as God calls us to learn from Him, as God points us to a higher power, a light above all lights, above politics, above sports and above everything in our world. Jesus is the One guiding LIGHT in our lives, from the weather each day to our eternal and heavenly future. In our text from Mark's Gospel Jesus is busy, busy, busy, training disciples and healing any and every person brought to Him. He is healing every possible disease as He demonstrates that He is not just a local teacher or a local healer like so many who came and went, centuries ago and even today.

Who's in charge of our lives? All of our planning and preparations can only go so far, we are never really in charge as much as we think or plan. We plan and things don't always work out. A few years ago Paula and I went to the Holy Land with a group from Camp Okoboji. The leader of our group was the director of the Camp. He organized it all and it was a wonderful trip for us and the entire group. But not so much for the Director! You see with all the plans he had made in preparation, he forgot one little important thing, his suitcase! It was still at home and so in the Holy Land each day he had to buy new clothes.

Who's in charge of our lives? May it be Jesus our Lord and Savior, the True and Perfect Leader. Here are four characteristics of a good leader and Jesus' fulfillment of them as we learn from this text:

1. **A leader assesses the magnitude of the problem, the possible danger and probable enemies!** Jesus was so successful, so popular, and so unusual that He soon had powerful critics. In fact His ministry began surrounded by His Apostles, but also surrounded by demonic enemies. Four times in this short story Mark reports that Jesus confronted demons, 'evil, unclean spirits' that were controlling the people. So while He heals He knows that the real most serious problem is a spiritual sickness, a spiritual danger, an eternal death. And so His healing is to confront the physical but also the spiritual sickness that lives in us and around us. And so this text v.32 reports that Jesus healed those *"..oppressed by demons"*. In verse 34 He *"..cast out many demons. And He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him."* And again in v.39: *"And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."*

2. **A leader takes charge, even when it's unpopular.** Because Jesus knows the enemy He constantly finds opposition to His ministry, even when He does good works for others, even from His own Jewish religious leaders. For example, toward the end of His ministry Jesus raises His friend Lazarus from the dead. But the local critics said: *"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"* After 3 long years of ministry that took place during constant criticism and attacks all of His work ended on the Cross of Crucifixion. But He knew the enemy, He knew the challenge, the danger and He met it head on,

3. **A leader knows His talents, his gifts, & how to use them with compassion and care for the welfare of others.** Jesus, our divine leader, was God Almighty, yet as a mere man He set aside His divine attributes and only partially used His divine powers to heal and to do miracles. But all miracles were done always in order to point the people to His true identity, to His divine mission. It was a mission of bringing the Gospel of eternal salvation to all people, to the Jews and non Jews, to you and me.

4. **A leader is always learning, a leader is always growing in order to improve his work.** In our text verse 35 reports this of Jesus: ***“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed.”*** Jesus, our spiritual leader is not too proud to get on his knees to pray for guidance, for wisdom and strength. He inspires us to slow down, to take time to think, to pray, to study, to grow in faith. What time of day is your spiritual quiet time to ask God for help, for daily guidance, for spiritual leadership? I’m sure you too are busy, busy, busy, but listen to Jesus’ who said in Matthew 6:33: ***‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.’***

Who’s in Charge here? In this text as I mentioned Jesus is doing two things; teaching and healing. Yet I am sure that His teaching and what He said was greatly overshadowed by what He did, how He took charge by His healing. Earlier in the synagogue He had healed a man with what St. Mark calls “an unclean spirit” who was screaming at Jesus and disrupting the worship. The reaction of the people is recorded in verse 27: ***“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”***

Healing instantaneously, healing diseases, casting out evil demons, what a recipe for Jesus to succeed, to demonstrate His authority, His leadership. Scriptures write that our bodies are the temple of God as we are created in God’s image. I hope you have read Pastor Conner’s last two Newsletter articles on the human body as created by God. I encourage you to read them if you haven’t already! His first article was entitled: ***“Jesus: Intelligent Designer and Remarkable Repair Man”***. And his second article was entitled: ***“A Cascade of Design: Appreciating Your Designed Body”***. One thing he wrote that amazed me was that we have 3 trillion cells in our bodies and like little machines they are constantly working to make our bodies function each hour and minute of our day. Jesus created and designed all of that, all of us. So Jesus can heal every and any disease. Yet our world sees our bodies as accidents of nature that somehow evolved from animals. How very sad!

Who’s in charge of our lives? Jesus heals all, no matter who they are. But it’s special when it is one of our loved ones who is healed like Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother in law. This is a great mother-in-law story of Jesus’ compassion for her and Peter’s wife and family. The healing was so complete and she felt so good that she immediately jumped up and as verse 31 says she ***‘began to serve them’***.

Wouldn’t be great to have Jesus visit us and touch the sick in our midst and see such a miracle. As a pastor I would love to have that power, to go to the hospital or a nursing home and touch the sick to instantly make them well. But God has not given me that power. But He has given me and all pastors and all believers the spiritual healing that comes from His Holy and Divine Word.

Our spiritual healing began at our Baptism or at our conversion when we were brought to faith. And our Lord keeps us in His care through the healing power of His Word and the Lord’s Supper that nourishes our souls.

Dear friends, who are the leaders who guide you, who you listen to, who you believe in? Who you will cheer for in 2024? Whether it is football, sports or politics or in any other area, the leaders of this age will never measure up to our leader, Jesus the Christ. Our earthly leaders may achieve great victories but these great achievements will be temporary and eventually they will fade.

We had a recent dramatic example of that in our own life. Last week our daughter gave birth to a beautiful

they had been planning, meeting regularly with their doctor, taking those amazing ultra sound pictures of the baby, consulting with the state of the art hospital and even a midwife, all going well as they waited for the big day, the due date. But when the contractions came and she went to the hospital, the doctor declared that she was too early and sent her home. Two hours later at home suddenly, before they could get back to the hospital, even before the EMT's could get there, the baby came with only our son-in-law to help her deliver.

We praise God that all worked out despite all the challenges. But it is certainly true that all our plans are not perfect. The prophet Isaiah wrote: ***"..For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*** *Isaiah 55:8-9*

Who's really in charge of our lives? Our True leader Jesus the Christ is truly in charge of all of our world and dear friends, of your daily life in this new year. Whatever may come, joys or sorrows may your faith rest in the hope that Jesus has won for you on the Cross of Calvary and from the Open Tomb. He has won for you the forgiveness of your sins, peace with God and the hope of eternal life in your real home forever.

The real example of Jesus' leadership is summed up in verse 38 in Jesus' own words: ***"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."*** This is the leadership we need, and we need to model and imitate, to preach and teach the Gospel. We need to first and foremost follow the True God, not the Devil or his evil demonic impostors in this world. This is Jesus' priority and should be ours, from Manilla Iowa to the ends of the world, saving souls through his divine Gospel message of His plan for salvation for the entire world.

It's not only pastors who preach but each of you by your life and lifestyle you are preaching and teaching a message of life, of what is your priority in living for you and your family. May we be like St. Paul who wrote in our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson: ***"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel"***. Let us begin with our own daily spiritual journey, to be strengthened by the Perfect Spiritual leader, Jesus! He strengthens us that we might strengthen others in order to provide spiritual leadership in our homes, in your church and the world.

Let's close by singing the beautiful hymn: "Christ Be My Leader": 861:

1. Christ be my Leader by night as by day; Safe through the darkness for He is the way, Gladly I follow, my future His care, Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.
2. Christ be my Teacher in age as in youth, Drifting or doubting, for He is the truth. Grant me to trust Him: though shifting as sand, Doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.
3. Christ be my Savior in calm as in strife; Death cannot hold me, for He is the life. Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain. Can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

Take that message home with you today and this week and may God guide our lives, as leaders called to serve Him, in this new year and forever

In Jesus' name.

Amen