

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: January 28, 2018**

**Annual Meeting 2017: Mark 1: 21-28:**

*God did not create us for comfort. God created for us for Greatness!*

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority not as the teachers of the law. That's an interesting phrase: "as one who had authority." Where does authority come from? If you've ever been in the military, you know where it comes from. It comes from rank or position in a hierarchy.**

**On one of the ships I served on, I was walking down the passageway to pick up Dramamine for a few guys in my division suffering from sea sickness.**

**Suddenly, I heard screams coming from Sick Bay. Machinist Mate Seaman**

**Wisebach was in Sick Bay suffering from an accident in the Engine Room. His**

fingers were crushed, swollen and immobile for a few days. As the swelling went down, the doctor ran some tests to measure the extent of his injuries. The doctor said, “Try to move the first finger of your right hand.” he tried, but couldn’t move it. The doctor suggested that they wait another day and try again. But, Seaman Wisebach’s Chief Petty Officer, who was standing nearby, stepped forward. He looked at Harry and commanded loudly, “*move the first finger of your right hand now!*” Lo and behold Harry Wisebach moved that finger. Maybe you’ve had a company commander, division officer or captain or even boss like that at some time. Of course, this type of authority has its limits.

As a carpenter, Jesus had no positional authority in the community. His authority came from his wisdom and knowledge and his competence at interpreting God’s Word. Even as a boy Jesus wowed people with his wisdom and his grasp of scripture. Of course the people in Capernaum could not know that his authority came from a more important source. All they knew is that they had never heard an individual teach like Jesus taught. They said to one another, “He teaches as one who has authority, not as the teachers of the law.” But even Jesus got interrupted from time to time. It was a man *in the synagogue* who disrupted Jesus’ teaching. Mark tells us this man was “possessed by an impure spirit.” We don’t know what Mark meant by this.

**Most modern people dismiss the idea of demons and unclean spirits. We assume this is pre-scientific language for mental illness, but who knows? Whatever the origin of his problem, obviously the man was deeply distressed. He cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are the Holy One of God!” It’s interesting. The impure spirits recognized who Jesus was long before the people of Capernaum. “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” And then something remarkable happened. The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.**

**The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” And Mark tells us, “News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.” “What is this?” the people asked, “A new teaching and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”**

**So, Jesus had authority because of his teachings. But he also had authority because of his power over what Mark calls “impure spirits.” In other places we see his authority over disease, and over nature, and even over death. This**

**brings us to something obvious we need to affirm about Jesus: he was unique. There was no one quite like him.**

**There were other fine teachers in Galilee, but they could not cast out impure spirits, or turn water into wine or heal the leper or multiply the loaves and the fishes or forgive sins. There was something about Jesus which could not be said about his contemporaries. He had authority. He had physical authority. He had spiritual authority. He had moral authority. Even after his death and resurrection, he had authority. When confronted by someone who was demon-possessed or who was blind or physically-challenged, all the disciples had to do was evoke Jesus' name and demons were cast out and the physically-challenged were made whole and the blind could see. That's authority.**

**Singer and songwriter Gloria Gaither put it this way as part of a musical that she and her husband Bill composed several years ago: "Jesus. The mere mention of His name can calm the storm, heal the broken, raise the dead . . . I've heard a mother softly breathe His name at the bedside of a child delirious with fever, and I've watched that little body grow quiet and the fevered brow cool. I've sat beside a dying saint, her body racked with pain, who in those final fleeting seconds summoned her last ounce of ebbing strength to whisper**

**earth's sweetest name Jesus, Jesus . . . Emperors have tried to destroy it; philosophers have tried to stamp it out. Tyrants have tried to wash it from the face of the earth with the very blood of those who claim it. Yet still it stands . . . Jesus . . ."** My sisters and brothers in Christ that is authority.

**Jesus was a wonderful teacher, but no mere teacher has the authority to raise the dead. Jesus was a leader, a prophet, a moral visionary but none of these explain his impact on civilization. As some unknown writer expressed it a generation ago: "Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40 and Jesus for only 3 ½ years. Yet the influence of Christ's ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined years of teaching from these greatest of philosophers. "Jesus painted no pictures, yet some of the finest artists such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from Him. "Jesus wrote no poetry, but Dante, Milton and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him. "Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the music they composed in His praise.**

**"Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter from Nazareth." It took a Roman centurion, stationed at the foot of**

**the cross who watched him die, to sum it all up, “Surely this man,” the centurion testified, “was the Son of God!” (Mt. 27-54)**

**No one else who has ever lived spoke with the authority with which Christ spoke. He was unique. There has never been another like him. This brings us to an obvious question: If Jesus is the son of God, shouldn't we reflect his influence more in our lives? If Jesus is the Son of the Most High God and if His teachings are the foundation upon which our lives are built, shouldn't that fact be reflected in how we live? You see my sisters and brothers God did not create us for comfort. God created us for greatness.**

**And this brings us to the big question: Shouldn't Holy Trinity Church be that bridge of friendship? Shouldn't Holy Trinity Church be that bridge of hospitality? Shouldn't Holy Trinity Church be that bridge of caring and kindness? Shouldn't Holy Trinity Church be that bridge of love to all who come through our doors and to all we reach out to so Jesus will walk across and meet the world's needs? You see my sisters and brothers, I truly believe Holy Trinity Church builds bridges to the people around us so that through us, Jesus may walk across that bridge and to meet the world's needs. I believe Holy Trinity Church is building a new and exciting bridge to others so that Christ may walk across to meet their needs.**

**So, come with me as I layout my vision for building bridges to couples seeking marriage in sacred space and how we are going to sustain ourselves both now and into the future.**

- **Holy Trinity Church is a warm, hospitable, and inclusive place. The church already welcomes everyone who comes to be married in sacred space by providing a beautiful and romantic setting by the sea.**
- **Holy Trinity Church can serve and provide any couple seeking marriage in sacred space with a traditional Episcopal wedding, as well as any faith tradition with the couple's officiant or simply a civil ceremony officiated by a Justice of the Peace or an officiant designated for the day.**
- **So, how will we begin to market Holy Trinity Church to prospective brides and grooms to build that bridge that Jesus can walk across and meet their needs? Holy Trinity Episcopal Church will use the following tactics to attract new customers:**
- **The Trade Show: On Saturday, February 17, 2018, I will attend the Newport Bridal Fair at Rose Cliff mansion in Newport, with Cheryl Twiss. Cheryl is the Vice President of Marketing and sales at Newport Hospitality. There has never been a church or a priest that has**

participated in Newport Bridal Show. We have one of the best locations in the center of the grand ballroom of Rose Cliff Mansion. Our location is perfect. This is well established bridal fair has many wedding vendors in attendance. On average there are 800-900 people show and approximately 400 brides with 25-30% of those brides attending are Newport area weddings. The show organizer feels Holy Trinity Church has a tremendous advantage in 2018 because there are no other officiants or religious site vendors at the Newport Bridal Fair. This is an opportunity for Holy Trinity Church to network with the wedding vendors for word of mouth referrals.

- **Open House:** Holy Trinity Church will follow up on the Bridal Fair with an open house in the parish hall one month after the bridal show. The restoration of the sanctuary will be complete by this time. The open house will take place on either a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. The reception will include a tour of the Holy Trinity Church campus and facilities with a reception in the parish hall with finger foods and drinks.
- **Networking:** We will network with the vendors during the Newport Bridal Fair. We will recommend their services to the couples we are preparing for marriage and if they are hired, we would ask for a 10% finder's fee.

- **Online Marketing:** Holy Trinity Church will have a designated web site and Face book page exclusively for our weddings. Go to the church web site at [www.holytrinitychurch.org](http://www.holytrinitychurch.org). On the right-hand side you will find “wedding video.”
- **Press Releases/PR:** We anticipate the restoration of the sanctuary to be completed by the end of February. At that time, we will announce the completion of our upgrades and restoration of the sanctuary in the East Bay Newspapers. There will be an invitation to the public with an open house and reception in the parish hall with finger foods, coffee, soft drinks and pastry. In the parish hall we will market our church as a wedding destination location.
- **Newport Wedding Magazine:** The Expo-site in this magazine is an “exclusive” for all of their bridal show exhibitors and wedding magazine advertisers only. [www.newportweddingmagazine.com](http://www.newportweddingmagazine.com) click on the ALIST tab and then choose officiants and ceremony sites. That is where Holy Trinity Church is listed along with six pictures of the church and a brief write up.
- My sisters and brothers in Christ, this will be just one more bridge of friendship Holy Trinity Church will build so that through us, through His disciples, Jesus Christ will walk across to meet the world’s needs. Is

**this a whole lot of work? Yes, indeed! Remember, God did not create us for comfort. God created us for greatness. AMEN.**