

“Maybe I’m Amazed”

Awake, alive, alert! It is one of those mornings when I am going to make you think. The question of the day is, what do you expect to experience or hope to experience when you come to church? [listen for quiet, peace, comfort, good music, friends, communion, community, a sermon, or a lesson to help me in my life]. There are lots of possibilities. Looking at today’s the Gospel reading I think a synagogue goer in Jesus’ time might have had similar expectations. Yet the adjectives used in Mark’s Gospel to describe their experience are anything but what we have named.

In this passage from Mark the words used to describe their experience that morning are “astounded” and “amazed.” They “were astounded at his teaching,” and “They were all amazed” at the healing. They came to synagogue expecting the usual, which is not a bad thing, but instead they are astounded and amazed.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught the people in the synagogue. He just tells us that the people perceived his teaching to be with knowledge and confidence. They thought that his way of teaching was much more authoritative than other teachers they had heard. Apparently a moderate-sized town like Capernaum did not get good Torah scholars. The people liked the way Jesus taught them about God and scripture. While the people may have been excited by Jesus’ teaching I doubt the scribes were.

After teaching the people, a man who was ill came to Jesus for healing. Jesus makes the man well, by simply saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” Jesus did not use medicine, radiation, psychotherapy, or complex treatments. While there were a number of miracle workers who traveled the country in Jesus’ day, the people found this healing was amazing. Because it was the authority of his voice that caused the demons to come out and make the man to be well.

Jesus reveals in these two brief episodes that he has special abilities that come from God. The people may not realize it yet, but they are starting to get the message that Jesus is a different kind of teacher, preacher and healer. He is one who can amaze people with how sure of himself he is when he teaches. He also shows them how he is different by the way in which he heals the man.

Imagine coming to church on Sunday or any day and being astounded and amazed. I do not mean that we have operatic singers, a new organ, more stained glass, or even vintage Bordeaux as our communion wine. Rather you are astounded and amazed at what Jesus is doing in our midst. It is true from an historical perspective, that Jesus was present in that synagogue. It is also true, from a spiritual and theological perspective, that Jesus is present among us right now.

Our expectations often set us up for what we receive. If we come expecting the same old church, we will probably get it. If we come to worship expecting something astounding and amazing, we will find it. If we come

seeking compassion and healing for our hurts it will be here. If we come expecting the music to speak to our wounds it will. If we come seeking a sermon that offers us comfort, we will hear it. If we expect Communion, will provide healing for the pain we bear we will taste it. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:10 from the Septuagint¹ saying, "For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them."² Let us not be dull, deaf and blind, but ready for healing.

The synagogue goes on that Sabbath in Capernaum came expecting the same old synagogue service. What they were experienced was astounding and amazing. You know that the next time they came to synagogue their expectations were different. With their eyes and hearts opened what they experienced had the chance to be astonishing.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."³ Jesus is not saying only children get to heaven, but rather those whose simplicity of faith, unconfused by worldliness and cynicism, are the ones who find the kingdom of heaven. Our serious grownup-ness can be a barrier that prevents us from coming close to God. Let it down. Set it aside.

We know in our hearts that Jesus is here in worship with us every time we meet regardless if it is Sunday morning worship, midweek Evening Prayer, or Thursday Holy Eucharist. If we come expecting to be astounded and amazed I can assure you, we will be. My teaching may not be amazing, and as far as I know I have not exorcised an unclean spirit or physically healed a disabled person. Yet, we can be amazed if we open our hearts to the wonder and healing power of the love of God, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that surrounds us and imbues us with the grace of God.

We have that option if only we have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts bright with the expectation that Jesus has come. Jesus is here. Jesus is ready to astound us with his teaching and amaze us with his miracles. Just listen for the still small voice of the Lord, and be ready to be amazed.

¹ The Septuagint was the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek that was predominant in Jesus' day.

² Matthew 13:15 NRSV

³ Matthew 19:14 NRSV