

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

### Intro

During these first few Sundays of Epiphany, we've been following Jesus as he begins his ministry.

We've been to his Baptism when the voice proclaimed him to be "God's Beloved Son;"

- we've heard him call his first Disciples;
- and now, Mark begins to show us a typical day in Jesus' life.

As we see in this day presented by Mark, a typical day for Jesus often involved going to the Synagogue for worship, and usually involved teaching, healing and calling people to follow him.

In the Judaism of Jesus' day, sacrifices could only be carried out at the Temple in Jerusalem.

So the **Synagogues** became centers of local religious life and teaching.

In fact, the Law stated that whenever there were 10 Jewish families, there needed to be a Synagogue.

So practically every town or village had a Synagogue – even Jerusalem had several Synagogues – as a place to gather for local worship and learning.

The Synagogue service was usually made up of 3 things: Prayer – a Reading from God's Word – and a teaching on that reading.

So the Synagogue became the place of teaching and instruction;  
- And it was to the Synagogue that Jesus went on this day.

## I. Something New



A. While he was at the Synagogue, Jesus was invited to “say a few words.”

1. Other Gospels go into more detail, but the outcome is always the same.

2. As we read in the Gospel, “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having *authority*, and not as the scribes?”

3. So just what does that mean?

4 The Scribes were a class of scholars who were experts in the Law.

5. When they taught, they always began saying something like: “There is a teaching that...” and would go on to quote all the authorities on that particular topic.

6. But Jesus’ teaching was different – he taught with **Personal Authority**, rather than relying on precedents from earlier generations.

7. As we hear elsewhere, Jesus would say, “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ...”

8. And the people were stunned – **this was something new** – they’d never heard anyone teach like that before in their lives.

B. Mark then tells us that Jesus’ authority was further manifested in an encounter with a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit.

1. The terms “*unclean spirit*” and “*demon*” are often used interchangeably in Mark.

2 And in this case, “*unclean*” is used here in the sense of **opposition to what is holy**.

3. Now in a time of less medical knowledge, things that were not understood were often cited as the work of one spirit or another – and so what might very well be an act of healing is seen as “*casting out the unclean spirit.*”

4. Jesus commands the Spirit to come out of the man, and it does with much noise and thrashing about.

- And once again, the people are astonished.

C. And the crowd responds with amazement: “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

1. The fact was, that not only did Jesus teach with authority, he displayed that authority by casting out the most powerful forces poised against him.

2. His teaching announces the *coming of the reign of God*, and calls the people to repentance – to refocus their lives toward God.

3. Here Jesus is a figure of power and mystery, and thus his fame begins to spread throughout Galilee.

## II. Living with Something New

A. The people of Jesus’ day lived in tenuous times.

1. It was a time of political instability, being governed by an occupying force much more interested in what it could get out of the people than what it could do for them.

2. It was a time with limited medical support, when disease and death were often swift and sudden, but more likely slow and lingering.

3. We too live against a similar background as we find people in our society often turned against one another, while COVID rages on.

4. Thus causing us to live our lives differently than we have ever had to before – and the same is true for us, here.



5. Looking back over the year that is past, we began by welcoming **Bishop Taylor** for a special service of “Candlemas” and Scout Sunday.

6. We joined the folks at Mount Cross for **Ash Wednesday** and then settled in for a holy Lent.

B. And then the world changed – little did we know we would be spending the rest of the year in different form of Lent, giving up many of the things we love and hold dear.

1. What to do about worship and being together quickly became our theme.

2. And before we could implement our procedures for “safe worship” – boom – we were closed and had to find new ways to gather to worship our God of love

3. All of a sudden we were living in a new reality – we were living “something new.”

4. New words like “livestream” entered our vocabulary as we all learned how to go to church in our pajamas on our computers.

5. As the “safe at home” orders continued, we looked for continuing opportunities for worship and in May began joining Mount Cross for joint services from Mt Cross livestreamed to both congregations, and then branched out to begin livestreaming our own services.

6. We started small, with an I-phone and a tripod, but soon, thanks to a grant from the Endowment Fund and the gifts of some generous givers, we began to purchase cameras and other equipment so we could host our own livestream from our beloved church.

7. And before you knew it, thanks to the work of our video crew, we had gone from a church that couldn’t figure out how to put the Sunday sermon on the webpage to having three cameras, a computer, a YouTube channel, and all the equipment to broadcast the Sunday service

8. One of the side benefits of all this is that we now have people who do not live in Camarillo watch our services and join in worship with us each week.

C. Meanwhile we were taking a drastic financial hit.

1. “If we are not able to worship together,” we wondered, “will people still pay their pledges?”

2. But YOU came through again and again demonstrating your love for the work and ministry of St. Columba’s not only paying those pledges but stepping up to make **additional gifts** to help make up our income shortfall.

3. And thanks to the work of our **Treasurer**, the **Vestry** and our **Finance Team** we were able to make it through these difficult financial times.

### III. Living Out Something New

A. But through it all mission and ministry DID happen.



1. We were able to care for our campus as we replaced the parish hall roof thanks to a gift from the Endowment Fund, an insurance payment, and the gifts of many of you.

2. We were able to patch the stucco on our buildings, replace a Parish Hall door, and accomplish other campus related projects.

3. Project Hope continued to feed people in need as we worked to assist those who were affected by the pandemic and needed food.

4. In the fall we applied for and received a grant from HUD through the City to expand our food offerings – we look to begin that work next month.

5. Our education programs also moved on line as we began to meet for Book Studies and other topics together via Zoom.

6. And we joined together with Mount Cross in the Upper Room Zoom – a midweek pause for 15 minutes of reflection and prayer.

B. And in the coming year MINISTRY WILL CONTINUE TO HAPPEN.

1. We are moving ahead with plans to have a joint Lenten Program with Mount Cross – and we plan to have our Ash Wednesday and Holy Week services together.

- And we hope other Education opportunities will follow.

2. As I mentioned earlier, a team is already at work to EXPAND our food ministry to an every week opportunity as we will open “St. Columba’s Pantry” in February.

3. Our Buildings and Grounds folks are actively at work reviewing the list of potential projects and working to keep our campus in the best shape possible.

C. And once we are past this pandemic there is so much more to do.

1. Once this is done – when we can gather together again – we are going to have to work to REBUILD the fabric of our life together.

2. We are going to have to find out together what it means to be St. Columba’s in post-pandemic times.

3. We are going to have to go out and find all those who have been left hurting by the isolation and lonesomeness of this disease and welcome them in with loving arms and invite them to be part of the new St. Columba’s.

4. For you see, our number one commodity is COMMUNITY.

5. The thing we specialize in being the loving family of God.

6. For a time we have been unable to do this – we have been kept back from being who we are – and we have all missed it.



7. Zoom meetings and livestreams can only go so far – it's the personal interaction one-on-one that we miss so much – and will need to work hard to reestablish again.

8. That is going to be our main task in the coming year – that is what your Vestry will be focused on – and we have four Vestry Candidates ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

9. And with God's help, we will be ready to meet the days to come – to rebound from this COVID time – and to move ahead to be God's people in this place and time – always ready to live into "Something new."

### Let Us Pray



We pray for our congregation – for the work and ministry we are called to do – and for all of us - in the words of this old Celtic Prayer:

Let us go forth: in the goodness of our merciful Father,

In the gentleness of our brother Jesus,

In the radiance of the Holy Spirit,

In the faith of the Apostles,

In the joyful praise of the Angels,

In the holiness of the Saints,

In the courage of the Martyrs.

Let us go forth: in the wisdom of the all-seeing Father,

In the patience of our all-loving Brother,

In the truth of the all-knowing Spirit,

In the learning of the Apostles,

In the gracious guidance of the Angels,

In the patience of the Saints,

In the self-control of the Martyrs.

Such is the path of all servants of Christ,

The path from death to eternal life. AMEN. (Synthesis CE 2015)

