

**- Saint John's Pulpit (January 31, Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany)  
- "How Much Do We Know?" Mark 1:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

***Authority***

Do you know Katherine Johnson (Aug. 26, 1918 - Feb. 24, 2020)? Some know, but others may not... happy to give you another tip. Do you remember that she was one of a group of African American women mathematicians at NASA from 1953 to 1988 and her story was illuminated in the 2016 movie "Hidden Figures?"

When I served my former appointment in Portsmouth, this movie became so popular. Eunice, my daughter watched it in a movie theater with her friend. Actually, watching this movie is one of the assignments in her math class. Her math teacher Ms. Cognion loved to talk about this movie and Ms. Johnson who was the only survivor at that time.

However, there was something special in Ms. Cognion's testimony. Why? She even visited Katherine Johnson and talked with her face to face! Without this specialty, we just think that "one math teacher loves to talk about one math heroine in that movie..." But when we knew that her testimony was from a real interview with Katherine Johnson, our reaction became different and serious! Why? That testimony has an authority!

### ***Jesus Vs. Scribes***

The text today presents a story of Jesus' preaching in a Jewish synagogue. Please know that it was not like Billy Graham's Revival meeting! On Sabbath Day, in a Jewish Synagogue, all Jewish adult men were qualified to share a message from the Law freely.

At that time, Synagogue did not have a kind of senior pastor. Only a ruler of the synagogue managed all meeting schedules and other administrations there. So, it was popular for Jewish man to share his message in the synagogue. Jesus was also qualified to do this, and he did it!

Unfortunately, we have no idea what kind of messages he preached. Even in the Gospel of Luke for the same story, no clue at all!

*<sup>31</sup> He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. <sup>32</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. Luke 4:31-32 NRSV*

But here is one clear thing. It is about one common reaction from people after Jesus' preaching which puts in Mark 1:22.

*<sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Mark 1:22 NRSV*

Apparently, this story is Jesus' first preaching after beginning his ministry. No idea what Scripture readings he used. But people loved his message and

found an authority that they never experienced from the scribes. Then, we need to ask this question. How did the scribes preach?

A main job from the scribes was relaying information, scriptures, quotations, and other sources to people. Although they had professional knowledge about the law, they did not speak their own voice. Simply speaking, they just told about God, but they did not show God whom they met!

We can see this example from a story of the Magi's visit at Herod's palace in Matthew 2. After hearing from the Wise Men about the birth of the Messiah, King Herod called hurriedly teachers and scribes and asked them to verify this uneasy rumor.

*4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Matthew 2:4-6 NRSV*

Can you feel any authority from these scribes and priests? Don't you think that they needed to say more like this?

*"Yes, my majesty, the Messiah is going to be born here soon. It is time to take an action. What these Wise Men are telling is true. Time to fulfill the greatest promise!"*

How poor they were! With their professional knowledge, they just relayed their lifeless knowledge to people! No authority, authenticity, and life! They just recited the Bible but couldn't redirect people!

However, Jesus was different. He did not speak about God, but this Son of God showed God through himself! He didn't waste time looking up the Bible, because he was the Word himself! Jesus did not use footnotes, but he visited people on foot! So, can we call this the Divine authority?

Now, it is time to check out what we are doing. Are we speaking about Jesus? Or Are we sharing Jesus whom we meet with people confidently? Please don't relay knowledge about God to people! Please let others know Jesus through your testimony! Your life attitude can be a powerful tool for God's mission, and even your language! People do not want to read another

translated version book written by others, but they want to read your own book containing your faith, thoughts, ideas, and feelings!

### ***The Evil Spirit Got an A-Plus!***

On the other hand, this story gives an interesting but serious fact about Jesus. When Jesus preached in the synagogue, an evil spirit recognized him exactly! This is a big irony. All the audiences couldn't do this. But only the evil spirit clearly knew who Jesus was.

*<sup>23</sup> Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> "Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Mark 1:23-24 NLT*

Indeed, Jesus struggled with this dilemma seriously. Although he tried to show a great vision of the Kingdom of God and wanted people to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, he had to be disappointed by people because of their wrong understanding of Jesus. Even Jesus' disciples were the same! After the miracle of feeding five thousand people, do you remember what people did for Jesus?

*<sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." <sup>15</sup> When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. John 6:14-15 NRSV*

Among Jesus' disciples, the Bible says only Peter made it to recognize clearly who Jesus was. Let me read Matthew 16:16-17.

*<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. Matthew 16:16-17 NRSV*

From these cases, we easily know that how so difficult we know about Jesus.

One heavy and serious question from the text today is this. How much do we know about Jesus? Don't you think that we should be much better than the unclean spirit in recognizing Jesus? In addition to this, do we Christians have authority in sharing Jesus with people? It is not a matter of relaying our knowledge to people, but it is a matter of helping people realize Jesus!

We are in a season of Epiphany. Just as Jesus showed himself to the world, not it is time to practice our 'epiphany' by showing Jesus Christ in us.