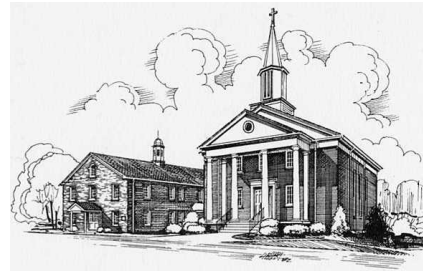


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Year B

RCL



Isaiah 40:21-31

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

Mark 1:29-39

The Collect

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 40:21-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the
earth?

It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? Says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high and see:

Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,

not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their
strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c Page 804, BCP

Laudate Dominum

- 1 Hallelujah! **How good it is to sing praises to our God!** How pleasant it is to honor him with praise!
- 2 **The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;** he gathers the exiles of Israel.
- 3 **He heals the brokenhearted** and binds up their wounds.
- 4 **He counts the number of the stars** and calls them all by their names.
- 5 **Great is our LORD and mighty in power;** there is no limit to his wisdom.
- 6 **The LORD lifts up the lowly,** but casts the wicked to the ground.
- 7 **Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;** make music to our God upon the harp.
- 8 **He covers the heavens with clouds** and prepares rain for the earth;
- 9 **He makes grass to grow upon the mountains** and

green plants to serve mankind.

10 **He provides food for flocks and herds** and for the young ravens when they cry.

11 **He is not impressed by the might of a horse;** he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12 But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear him, in those who await his gracious favor.

21c Hallelujah!

Mark 1:29-39

Jesus left the synagogue at Capernaum, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When

they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

SERMON

I often drive by the power station on US 23 at the end of our little road. I can't even imagine how many volts or kilowatts or whatever it is that flows through those wires but every time I pass it the whole thing is covered in birds, top to bottom and side to side. They sit on enough power to instantly kill them, but they are oblivious to it. It makes me think of our world. We're so sure of our ability to understand our world that we have become oblivious to the power in the wires beneath our awareness. It makes us over-confident at the very least, and perhaps worse than that.

A colleague and I were once kvetching by email. Do you know the Yiddish word, "Kvetch"? To kvetch is to complain. I know Presbyterians don't kvetch. Presbyterians suffer in orderly silence, but sometimes, pastors

kvetch, and I was born with a Yiddisher kopf – a Jewish head – so I kvetch.

My colleague said, “May I confess my frustration with people my age who act like they don't give a hoot about church or God? ” I agreed. It is a matter of endless frustration for me (and most others who find themselves in the odd position of being pastor to a church). Anybody who spends as much time online as I do can't help but notice what an item of derision Christians have become. “Love their hearts. Still believe in a magical Jewish carpenter. None of the cool kids still believe in a magical Jewish carpenter.” Sometimes I feel like Isaiah running around in a great sweat yelling,

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations
of the earth?

while the cool kids sit like birds on a wire, oblivious to the power humming beneath them and the great potential for change that power represents.

Of course, we pastors don't take this lying down. We go to training sessions to find new ways to approach people so we don't sound so much like somebody's worrisome Aunt Margaret and to find ways to make the good news Jesus announced palatable to the cool kids. We work ourselves up to a pretty good froth, which, of course, makes the message even less palatable to the cool kids. Sometimes, I wonder if Jesus worries about this as much as pastors do. Jesus is always depicted as calm and confident. Wonder if He knows something we pastors don't?

Last year, we read from Matthew. Matthew is the "tell me" Gospel. It is filled with sayings, parables and

teachings of Jesus. This year, we read from Mark. Mark is the “show me” Gospel. Mark makes his case not on what Jesus said, but on what Jesus did. Where Matthew tells us of Jesus' genealogy, of a birth accompanied by heavenly signs showing that even nature is aware of the change in Creation, Mark shows us a woman with a fever.

Jesus left the synagogue at Capernaum, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

In Mark's telling, Jesus isn't who he is because of his wise sayings. Jesus is who He is because his very actions speak of the existence of power unsuspected by the birds on the wires. Jesus' actions say, “Something

big is happening. Your world is changing. Pay attention!”

So far in Mark’s telling of the Gospel, Jesus is an untested new preacher. All we really know is that something he said to James and John, Andrew and Simon caused them to abandon their nets and follow him. Something about his manner or his presence worked a mighty change in them. Something in Jesus’ presence has enabled these men to become aware of the power in the wires.

Last week, we watched with James and John, Andrew and Simon as Jesus began his ministry by teaching in the synagogue. Mark tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue and taught “with authority”. The Greek word Mark used, *exousia*, can also mean “power”, “strength” or “right”. Mark tells us that everybody noticed His dis-

play of *exousia* in the synagogue. Once again, something in Jesus' manner or words changes people. Something in the way Jesus presents himself to the men in the synagogue grabs them. While he's in the synagogue, He drives a demon out of a man.

“I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” said the demon. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.”

Exousia, would be better translated here as “power”. There is power in the wires, and their world is just beginning to sense it. With that background, Mark follows Jesus, James and John, Andrew and Simon, as they leave the synagogue, go to Simon's house, and step into the text for today.

We think of Jesus and the Disciples as being mostly

on the road so it is always a little jarring to hear that they had homes and families. That's what makes the call of Simon so surprising. We learn today that he had a house, and a sick mother-in-law. That means he had a wife. Church tradition is that her name was Perpetua. When Jesus and the four disciples arrive, Perpetua's mother is confined to bed with a fever. Mark tells us:

“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

So far, Mark has shown us that the authority of Jesus is displayed in his power to work change in the lives of those who listen to Him, in his authority over demons, and, now, his power over even physical illness. This is a lot of *exousia* we're being shown.

Today's churches show their *exousia* by building bas-

ketball courts. Some have coffee bars. Most modern churches have “family life centers” and Weight Watchers meetings, and baby sitting services and ski trips for the youth. All those things are important. We want safe, attractive places where our families can gather. We want our churches to be vital parts of the community, but Jesus had none of those things and none of those things is what Jesus was about. Mark tells us that His message was brief.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Church, how would that play out in 21st Century America? What sort of reception would we give a preacher like that? Guy walks into a bar and says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come

near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Is it any wonder that so many contemporary people, unaware of the power in the wires, characterize those who follow the message of Jesus as being a little soft in the head? Isn't it even possible that our over-confident approach to our world has left us as clueless to the possibilities offered us by God as the birds on the wires of the substation?

We know how to collect money to build big education buildings. We know how to build church schools and family life centers.

Do we know how to follow the brief message of Jesus?

We know how to band together to form institutions for the furtherance of our message. We know how to protest political decisions we believe to be contrary to

our understanding of the Gospel. We know how to go to assemblies and debate what we see as the big questions facing our denomination.

Do we know how to follow the brief message of Jesus?

It may be that we in the 21st Century have become so mesmerized by modern life that we are no longer aware of the power in the wires. Maybe, in our worst moments, we have even looked to the church to reassure us that our sins are not as bad as the sins of those outside the church. The brief message of Jesus was that the kingdom of God has drawn near and that we are to repent. Who would follow such a message today? Has today's world completely lost the ability to sense the power in the wires?

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I have so many good friends who act like they don't give a hoot about church or God. They are not dumb, or hardhearted. Generally, they are compassionate people with good minds and equally kind dispositions. When I scratch my head over them, I sometimes wonder why God has not called to them more strongly.

Then I think, “And what business is it of yours that God calls one and not another?” My friends, my birds on a wire, sit upon unimaginable power, but remain unaware of it because they have not connected with it. That's God's business. Our business is to bring the simple message of Jesus into the world as He did.

“Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.”

May the love of God the Father
The Grace of God the Son
And the Communion of God the Holy Spirit abide
with you from this day forth.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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