

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 9
Year B

Ezekiel 2:1-5
Psalm 123
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Mark 6:1-13

Over the past few weeks, the Gospel readings from Mark have posed the same question in several different forms. That question is, who is this man Jesus? What I find remarkable is that, while answering this question, the underlying cause for all of the actions Jesus takes is His total obedient faith in God. Everything Jesus does is based on this faith. But, who is this man, really? One way to look at Jesus is to study His actions - what He does in each of these stories.

A couple of weeks ago, we had the story of Jesus and the disciples in a boat in the midst of a great storm. While the disciples were in a panic about the boat being swamped, Jesus was asleep in the rear of the boat. Upon being awakened, Jesus calms the wind and sea with His word, to which the disciples react with awe and say, "who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" As a result of this episode, we might say that Jesus is king of the created order - speaking to creation just as creation happened by God speaking the words. Jesus does not rebuke the disciples but only asks, "Have you still no faith?"

In last week's lesson, we had the story of two incidents of healing - Jarius' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage. This is a contrast of status and how Jesus reacts to them. Jarius is a community leader of privilege, powerful and, of course, a man. The woman is an outcast and in poverty because of her disease, powerless and absolutely vulnerable in their society. Both of these express their faith in Jesus' ability to solve their problems and in His authority over issues of life and health. Both sought a direct, personal relationship with Jesus based on their faith in Him. When confronted by the two concerns simultaneously, Jesus resolves the needs of the poor woman ahead of the needs of the powerful man. This series of actions presents another picture of Jesus - as king of life and the law.

According to the law, this woman was an outcast. Because of her illness, she was not allowed near others for fear she would make them impure. Being a woman, she would not be permitted to approach a man who was not part of her family, much less touch him. Thus, she should have been shunned - pushed away, not engaged in conversation. Yet Jesus casts aside the regulations of purity to show compassion for this woman. When Jesus arrives at the house of Jarius and finds his daughter dead, Jesus shows His kingship over life as well. In raising her from the dead, Jesus again breaks the taboos of the law by touching the body of the dead girl, raising her up by her hand. Again, Jesus casts aside the purity laws, as well as showing Himself as master of life. Like the disciples in the previous episode, those with Jesus were struck with awe and wonder at what kind of man this could be.

Another incident in the story following the calming of the sea presents a third area of mastery by Jesus which is amplified in our reading today. After the sea was calmed, Jesus and the disciples

went ashore in the land of the Gerasenes. They are immediately greeted by a man possessed by a legion of demons. Like the demon cast out of the man in the very first incident in the synagogue, this demon identifies Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. By casting out these demons in both of these situations, Jesus shows His kingship over the spiritual realm. As He sends the disciples out on their first experience of mission works, Jesus gives them power over demons as well - a power He could share because He had exhibited such power Himself.

The remaining issue in these stories is the reaction the people of Nazareth had to Jesus' ministry. When He appeared in their synagogue, the people were amazed by the wisdom and power Jesus displayed. They could only remember Him as that kid down the street, or the man who worked with wood so well - nothing that would have permitted Him to be trained as a scribe or rabbi. They were incensed that Jesus had risen above His status to become someone better than them. They knew His family, they knew His work, but they did not understand His ministry. They could see the miracles He had performed, but did not understand how He did them. They lacked the faith Jarius and the woman had in Jesus.

Who is this man Jesus? That is the same question raised for us today. This is a question each of us must address within ourselves. The disciples struggled with their faith in Jesus throughout His ministry. His family rejected His ministry, seeking to save Him from Himself. Who do you say this man Jesus is? Jarius and the woman believed and had their prayers answered. Even the demons knew who He was.

The disciples learned that, by accepting the authority Jesus gave them, they were also accepting great responsibility. They saw how the people were cured and the demons cast out because of their ministry. They began to understand some of the qualities that made this man Jesus different. How do we understand Him? Who is this man Jesus?