

“What Have You to Do with Us?” Mark 1:21-28; Epiphany 4-B,
February 1, 2015

“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” is a movie that was released by Hollywood in 1967; a movie that won 2 academy awards that year and since then has become a timeless classic. It tells the story of a **rich Upper Class white couple** played by Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn, who **anticipate** meeting their daughter’s new fiancé at a dinner to be hosted by them in their home. From everything they have heard about their future son-in-law, they have every reason to like him. After all, he is a well-respected, highly successful physician.

The twist in the movie comes when he walks into their home and is “surprisingly black,” one facet of this man’s personal makeup that their daughter neglected to mention. Suddenly their built up excitement is translated into a **mix of surprise, confusion and shock!** HE’S SO DIFFERENT FROM WHOM THEY EXPECTED HIM TO BE!

The words of our Gospel lesson this morning could be properly entitled: **“Guess Who’s Coming to Galilee”** because when our **LORD and SAVIOR Jesus Christ, as the long-promised Messiah,** finally arrives on the scene he also turns out to be **someone far different from whom people were expecting!**

In our Gospel lesson this morning, St Mark tells us that soon after Jesus had just called **Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John to become his disciples, he journeys with them into their hometown of Capernaum;** that coastal city on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. On the Sabbath Day Jesus **goes with them into the synagogue and “immediately” begins teaching the people who were there.** Here is that little word **“immediately”** again, found **27 times in the 16 chapters of Mark’s Gospel,** expressing to us the sense of urgency that Jesus always felt when it came to his fulfilling the mission which the Heavenly Father had set before him!

Please note, however, that St. Mark is not so much interested in sharing with us the **CONTENT** of that which Jesus had to teach there that day as he is interested in telling us the **MANNER IN WHICH JESUS’ TEACHING WAS RECEIVED BY THE PEOPLE OF CAPERNAUM WHO HEARD HIM GLADLY!** *“They were ASTONISHED,”* Mark tells us, *“because he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes!”*

For Jesus to teach with authority means, among other things, that he is the one who ultimately arrives on the scene in fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy in our Old Testament lesson today: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers—it is to him you shall listen!”*

(Deuteronomy 18:15). For Jesus to teach as one who had authority was for Jesus to teach as one who had a **direct pipeline to the Heavenly Father above!** For Jesus to teach with authority means that he **taught the Word of God very persuasively and there wasn't even the slightest hint of ambiguity in anything which our Lord had to say.** Jesus' teaching caused these people to sit on the edge of their seats and hang on to every word that poured forth from our Savior's mouth with bated breath. His teaching filled them with a real sense of alarm, encouragement, hope and confidence!

But brothers and sisters, wouldn't you know it! Just when Jesus was preaching what must have been a real "barnburner" of a sermon, there is this man with an "UNCLEAN SPIRIT" who stands up in the middle of the synagogue and interrupts our LORD's teaching in a most impolite and discourteous way! And the man cries out, though it was actually the demons who possessed this man who were crying out through his lips; demons who were multiple in their nature: "WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO WITH US JESUS OF NAZARETH?"

Brothers and sisters, these demons were certainly not "stupid" demons; not by any stretch of the imagination! These demons knew full well the answer to their question they were putting before Jesus in the midst of this highly-engaged congregation! In a sense, they go on then to answer their very own question: "*Have you come to destroy us?*"

And they knew full well that Jesus had come into this world to destroy them, to hogtie Satan and all his evil angels.

In their disruption of the worship service there in the synagogue in Capernaum that day these demons first of all announce something that many people seated there quite possibly already knew.

(1) SOME KNEW THAT JESUS WAS FROM THE CITY OF NAZARETH, some 40 miles south of Capernaum. But then these demons go on to reveal **two other very important truths about Jesus of Nazareth** and his mission of which they formerly had no knowledge of whatsoever!

(2) THE DEMONS SECONDLY ANNOUNCE TO THE CONGREGATION THAT JESUS HAD COME INTO THIS WORLD TO DESTROY SATAN AND ALL HIS EVIL ANGELS.

(3) AND THEN THIRDLY, THEY ANNOUNCE THAT JESUS WAS THE “HOLY ONE OF GOD;” nomenclature no doubt that would have identified him as the long-awaited Messiah, the Promised Savior of the world!

“But Jesus rebuked him saying, ‘Be silent and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him!” (Vv. 25-26)

For Jesus not to have cast those demons out of this poor man would have been for Jesus to compromise the very purpose for which he came into this world! May I say that again? For Jesus not to have cast those demons out of this man, would have been for Jesus, to compromise the very purpose for which he came into this world!

Friends, if these demons **were smart enough to ask this all-important question of Jesus in that day, shouldn’t we also be smart enough to ask this all important question of Jesus in our day too?**

“JESUS WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO WITH US?” And isn’t this the question that this Gospel lesson prompts us to ask of our Lord Jesus Christ again today; the **ONE WHO WAS COMPLETELY OBEDIENT ALWAYS TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER’S EVERY CLAIM UPON HIS LIFE?** Isn’t this the question that the Gospel lesson empowers us to ask of our Lord Jesus Christ again today--*“The One who was put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25)?*

(1) Brothers and sisters, Jesus would certainly have us recognize the fact that Satan is still very much alive and present in our world today! Jesus, immediately after his Baptism, was led by the Holy Spirit of God out into the desert (wilderness) where he was tempted by Satan for forty days and forty nights; but still emerged as the **VICTORIOUS ONE!** *“He was tempted in every way as we are, but he never sinned” (Hebrews 4:15)!*

(2) And Jesus would certainly have us own up to the fact that Satan has the power to cause every one of us a great deal of harm, even as he desires to use us to harm the lives of other people all around us! In **Luke 17:1**, Jesus says: ***“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin!”***

And certainly the **apostles in their New Testament writings also fully agree.** St. Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:10-13**, *“Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might! Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood only, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic forces of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm!”*

Jesus had tried to warn Peter that Satan was out to get the best of him on the eve of our Lord’s passion and suffering. He told Peter pointblank, “Satan has desired to sift you like wheat!” (Luke 22:31) But all Peter could do, it seems, was to take refuge in his own **self-confidence**, a confidence that in this instance at least was greatly misplaced!

“Jesus, what do you have to do with us?”

He said, *“I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly!”* (John 10:10) Jesus said, *“Come to me all of you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls! For my yoke is easy and my burden is light!”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

Unfortunately, however, we live in a day when people want to discount the reality of Satan and his presence in this world altogether, and deny his ability to wreak havoc in our lives altogether! We live in a day when many people while reading the Holy Bible want to **reassign the whole issue of demon-possession** as a primitive explanation of first century people living in a **prescientific age!** But are there times, do you think, when people in that first century world **may have confused people suffering from some types of deep psychological disorders**, or some blatant forms of mental illness, with the **reality of demon-possession?**

Were there times when people who were suffering from **epilepsy** in that first century world could have mislabeled this disease as demon possession? It’s possible because that is the only way they knew how to explain the horror of epileptic seizures in their day! It’s possible that sometimes this was the case, **but this doesn’t mean that there was no such thing as human beings actually suffering from demonic possession—back then and still today.**

JESUS, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO WITH US? Wouldn’t Jesus want us also to recognize him as the Savior of our souls, *the One who redeemed us lost and condemned creatures, who purchased and won us from all sins, death and the power of the devil, not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with his holy precious blood and his innocent sufferings and*

death all that we might be his own and live with him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns unto all eternity? (Small Catechism, AC Article 2, Meaning)

You know if you asked the **general populace today who is the most powerful man alive in the world today**, you would probably come up with **many answers?** Some say that the most powerful man in the world today is the President of the United States of America, though others tell us is Vladimir Putin, President of Russia. Some say that one of the most powerful men in the world is the new CEO of Comcast Communications, Brian L. Roberts, now that Comcast has bought Time-Warner for \$45 billion, meaning that Comcast now controls 2/3 of the Cable Networks in the USA today!

Others might say that the most powerful man in the world today is Bill Gates. According to the most recent publication of **FORBES MAGAZINE** Bill Gates net worth is supposed to be around **\$79 billion**. Someone has said that if he **dropped a five-hundred dollar bill, it would hardly be worth his bending over to pick it up; a man who make \$25 million each day.**

But Bill Gates is also the **greatest philanthropist in the history of the world.** He and his wife Melinda, who founded the **"Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,"** have given more than **\$30 billion** away since 2000; a fortune that on its own would be one of the **20th largest fortunes in the USA today.** The foundation is working to **eliminate polio** in the three countries where it exists and is **committed to stamping out malaria wherever possible.** Last September the Gates Foundation pledged **\$50 million to fight Ebola in West Africa.** Being the most generous philanthropist in American history, **Bill Gages is also working to improve education,** in part by paying college tuitions for talented students through a **\$1.37 billion grant to the United Negro College Fund.** But when he was also asked what was it that prompted him to be such a powerful benefactor to so many people in the world, he **didn't miss the opportunity to openly identify himself and his wife and their children as Christians,** all of whom are members and a worshipping part of the Roman Catholic Church, where his pointed out his children also attended parochial school.

If you were to ask Bill Gates who is the most powerful man alive in the world today, he might quite possibly tell you that this **man is Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified and Risen Savior of the world,** who still comes to each of us today with his body and his blood in, with and under the earthly gifts of bread and wine for the forgiveness of all our sins in his Holy Supper.

In closing let me also tell you about a couple from Great Britain who recently flew here the eastern United States, upon which they rented a car and decided to drive across the country out to the west coast. They saw so many beautiful places of scenery along the way they started to question in their own minds if that natural wonder called the GRAND CANYON could actually be worth seeing or not; for after all it is only a big hole in the ground these Europeans thought to themselves. But when they drove up to the south rim of the Grand Canyon, they found themselves looking into what they soon described as the most beautiful landscape they had ever seen with their own eyes. "It literally took our breath away! It is huge! No description and no picture," the man wrote, "can ever do it justice or prepare you for it. It is astounding!"

And isn't this our primary goal in the Epiphany Season, to preach the Word of God with authority today so that people might come to see the most beautiful thing or place in the world today is not really a thing or a place at all, but a person: Jesus Christ our Beautiful Savior, King of Creation! Amen

**Beautiful Savior, King of Creation! Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love you! Truly I'd serve you! Light of my soul, my joy, my crown!**

**Fair are the meadows! Fair are the woodlands; robed in flowers of blooming spring!
Jesus is fairer! Jesus is purer! He makes my sorrowing spirit sing!**

**Fair is the sunshine! Fair is the moonlight! Bright the sparkling stars on high!
Jesus shines brighter! Jesus shines purer than all the angels in the sky!**

**Beautiful Savior! King of creation! Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor! Praise, adoration, now and forevermore be thine!**