

# Commissioned by the Holy Spirit

Lent 1: March 1, 2009

Proper, Year B: Mark 1:9-15

The Rev. Deacon Kirk Duffy

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH, AND THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OUR HEARTS BE ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, OH LORD, OUR ROCK AND OUR REDEEMER. AMEN

Jesus saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." <sup>12</sup>At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,

Mark's gospel is the shortest of the 4 gospels.

His is the only one without biographical or historical details about Jesus. Instead, Mark's account begins with this rather unusual confluence of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Although he's brief, Mark still makes some important points.

- Jesus is commissioned by the Holy Spirit. Jesus claimed NOTHING. His only affirmative act was to accept baptism from John. Through the HS, Jesus receives the character and capabilities necessary for his public ministry.
- The HS comes upon Jesus ONLY, NOT anybody else. Jesus' uniqueness is established "up front." It's later on that the apostles and his other followers receive their commissions.
- Jesus KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING. He SAW both the opening of heaven AND the descent of the spirit.

On Ash Wednesday, Father Richard described Lent as an opportunity to climb out of our spiritual ruts. As reminded us, there are plenty of opportunities for us to do that.

We need, however, something more than these very worthwhile activities. Mark tells us that the Holy Spirit was essential to Jesus' ministry, and I am here to tell you it is essential TO OURS!

So let's talk ABOUT the Holy Spirit.

- How do WE engage it?
- How do we know it's present? and
- What happens when it shows up?

But FIRST some basic points:

1. Engagement with the HS is INTENTIONAL. We have to believe that the HS exists, accept that it has power, and to decide to seek it out. Without this intentionality, YOU WILL NEVER FIND IT.

2. Our intentions will require ACTION on our part. As James reminds us, we are called to be “doers,” and not just “hearers.”
3. The HS will take us out of our comfort zone. Jeremiah was one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, but HE TOO had to start somewhere. When the initial call came from God, all he could think of to say was: “Ah, Sovereign Lord God! I do not know how to speak, for I am only a child.”
4. When we are led by the Holy Spirit, we become MORE LIKE CHRIST!!

I'm going to share 3 manifestations of the HS. When any of them appear, you have received an invitation to be MORE LIKE CHRIST!!

The first is SURRENDER

We see surrender in today's gospel. Jesus is “driven” immediately into the desert. Sounds forced, doesn't it? A chain of command is laid down here: Mark gives no account of what Jesus' own priorities might have been.

If you look at today's Psalm [it's in your leaflet] verses 4-5, I think, set the right tone:

<sup>4</sup> Show me your ways, O LORD,  
teach me your paths;

<sup>5</sup> guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long.

The Kairos prison ministry is built upon surrender. 30-40 men, from a variety of denominations come together to minister as a team. We come from all walks of life. I have served with doctors, lawyers, truck drivers, deputy US Marshalls, teachers, and businessmen. We choose to come together as a team. Otherwise, the ministry fails. We acknowledge freely to both ourselves AND the participants that Jesus really leads the team. Unexpected things happen all the time, and our Leader tells us what to do.

I have a needlepoint, given to me by a Kairos brother, that says it all:

“Trust me, I have everything under control [signed] Jesus”

We go to Reidsville on March 26. My duties for the upcoming weekend will be determined by our lay leader, Fred. Whatever he asks me to do is whatever God wants me to do. Fred trusts God, and I trust Fred.

And we have much the same dynamic here at St. Thomas, where people come together serve in the various ministries we have here.

Matthew is incarcerated at Marion State Prison in Ohio, and he put it this way:

I miss good food, I miss comfortable clothes and I miss my bed. Yet when I think of life in, or out of prison I constantly strive to focus on what is God's. How will I grow in love and relationship with my friends? Where will I worship, how will I minister? What is God asking of me, and how will I answer? I do not know the answer to all of those questions, but I know God. Whatever God give me; I hope I have the courage to offer it back in service.

And what is the result of surrender? We

- We become MORE like Christ, AND
- The power of our ministry is multiplied.

Surrender opens the door to the SECOND manifestation of the HS:

SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is fundamental to Jesus' ministry.

Listen again to part of today's Epistle:

<sup>18</sup>For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

The Prayer Book tells us that his sacrifice was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." This is an important point, Thomas Cranmer didn't want anyone to miss it!!

The sacrifice of Jesus inspires OUR sacrifice!

Several years ago, a very unusual candidate came to Kairos. We can't use real names, so we'll call him George. He got along well with other inmates, and clearly had their respected.

Now, inside the institution, respect is earned through intimidation and violence. George didn't come across that way.. Also, he didn't project the "hangdog" look which is characteristic of people in prison. We found out that he was a decorated Iraq war veteran serving time for assault. As the weekend progressed, we learned that the army wanted him back as soon as he finished his time! Well, as Paul Harvey says, "here's the rest of the story."

George had pled guilty to assault, but neither the prosecutor nor the judge really believed he was guilty!

It turns out that his younger brother, who had been in trouble before, had been with him when the assault occurred and was actually the guilty party! George, but not his brother was eligible for First Offender Status.

As a First Offender, you can clear your record by staying “clean” for a designated period after release. George’s brother had a previous record and faced a harsh sentence as a repeat offender.

The bottom line was this: George CHOSE to sacrifice 2-3 years of his life to help his brother! Father Richard often talks about “willing hearts,” and George certainly had one!!

Sacrifice is also part of life here at St. Thomas. Some of you have come here all of your lives, and others of you may have never been here before today. All of us, however, look around and see the same beautiful facilities.

Everything about STC, both the facilities themselves and the parish community that uses them, are the DIRECT RESULT of hard work and sacrifice of those who came before us. It has all been given to us.

- Sacrifice has gotten us to where we are now.
- We are called upon, as individuals AS WELL AS a parish, to preserve this legacy and to pass it on INTACT to the next generation. It won’t happen without OUR sacrifice.

I learned about sacrifice during my ordination journey. There was a lot of reading and writing, and I had to meet with various committees along the way. I owned a business. Business and the ordination studies took up most of my time.

Along the way, however, the Holy Spirit proved its power. The necessary sacrifices were made, and they had a quality of EFFORTLESSNESS about them.

I’m sure you’ve heard the expression [pause] “the only Jesus someone meets might be you.”

Here’s how that works:

When our sacrifice imitates Christ’s sacrifice, non-believers sense it and are curious.

They are curious, because such sacrifice is COUNTERINTUITIVE.

The Holy Spirit encourages and enables us to satisfy that curiosity and to talk about our faith.

When we talk about our faith, we participate in the Great Commission.

Okay, we’ve talked about surrender, and we’ve talked about sacrifice.

The third characteristic is OBEDIENCE [pause]

Yes, you heard it right.

I am hard-pressed to think of ANY concept less popular OR MORE MISUNDERSTOOD in today’s culture than obedience. In fact, it is often a subject of ridicule.

Post modern Western culture tells us that:

- our thoughts, our feelings are the centerpiece, and
- our life mission is to put everything else into its proper place around ourselves.

But the truth is far less pleasant.

Francois Mahriac was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century novelist who had a profound conversion experience in his early forties.

Listen carefully.

If you are like me, you will see yourself in his words.

People may laugh and scoff at you for being unworthy of the title of free man and for having to submit yourself to a master... But this enslavement is really a miraculous liberation, for even when you were free you spent the whole time forging chains for yourself and putting them on, riveting them tighter and tighter each moment. During the years when you thought you were free, you submitted like an ox to the yoke of your countless hereditary ills.

From the hour of your birth not one of your crimes has failed to go on living, has failed to imprison you more and more every day, OR has failed to beget other crimes. The Man, Jesus, you submit yourself to DOES NOT WANT YOU TO BE FREE TO BE A SLAVE; he breaks the circle of your fetters, and, against you half-extinguished and still-smouldering desires, He kindles and REKINDLES the fire of GRACE.

Obedience is a big deal! It's a big part of the problems sweeping through TEC and other mainline Protestant denominations.

Now I'm going to get in trouble for saying this, but I'm going to say it anyway.

**YOU CANNOT BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT BEING OBEDIENT!!**

If you seek self-fulfillment on the world's terms, you have come to the wrong place!!

Why is this so?

Well, let's look again at Jesus.

- Obedience was a big part of his ministry.
- He was obedient to the law, and
- His obedience withstood challenge from the best intellects of his day.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us:

**Philippians 2:8 (New International Version)**

<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Obedience shaped Jesus' public ministry, and it ought to shape ours as well.

Earlier I mentioned Kairos. Kairos has rules regarding the operation of the ministry.

The rules cover things like the content of the program, the structure of the program, relationships with the institution, team organization, team structure, finance, and dealing with denominational differences.

But wait, there's more!

Every team member agrees to read and abide by a "Policy Statement on Interdenominational Christian Ministry." I'd like to share part of it with you:

Kairos does not try to be a final authority on Christian doctrine. As volunteers, Jesus Christ has transformed our lives, and we seek with a servant's heart to share our experience and faith with inmates. Clergy and lay persons who participate in Kairos must be willing to support and uphold the ecumenical nature of this ministry... Each of us is called upon to lay down private agendas, die to ourselves, and to serve with all our heart and mind.

Obedience has been painful in my relatively short career in ordained ministry. [be emphatic here!]

I was ordained on 8/15/07 at Christ Church. Many of you know that I spent 15 wonderful years with that congregation. The parish was essential to my ministry formation, and I had looked forward to many years of ministry on Johnson Square. Unfortunately, JUST 6 WEEKS after I was ordained, the parish aligned with the Anglican Church of Uganda.

And I was forced into a [slowly] very... painful... place.

I wanted to stay at Christ Church, but something was holding me back.

It took about 2 weeks for the answer to come.

Please open your prayer books to p. 538. [pause] you will see the Ordination Rite for deacons. You will see where I was asked the following question:

"...will you, in accordance with the canons of this Church, obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work?"

My answer was as follows:

"I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church."

Now, ordination vows are (OR OUGHT TO BE) "sacred ground" for everyone in ordained ministry. They are both public and personal. They are fundamental to ALL ordained ministry.

It all became very clear. I could break this commitment if I really wanted to, and a lot of people would have [pause] "understood."

IF I CHOSE DISOBEDIENCE, I WOULD HAVE

- NO MINISTRY
- NO TESTIMONY
- NO MESSAGE
- AND [AT THE END OF THE DAY] NO INTEGRITY!!

Brothers and sisters, I promised to do my best to obey, and I hadn't yet done my best.

I would never ever be able to talk about obedience if I had been disobedient myself.

TEC doesn't do a very good job dealing with disobedience. I am trusting that God has removed me from being part of the problem and called me to be part of the solution.

When we turn away from surrender, sacrifice, and obedience and towards self absorption, entitlement, and disobedience, WE ARE DOOMED and will settle for a life without purpose, without wisdom, and without power.

The good news is that the HS extends a helping hand rather giving us a cold shoulder.

It's an invitation, and not a demand.

When we sample surrender, sacrifice, and obedience, we find common ground with Jesus.

Do you feel a bit lost? Maybe you feel unqualified?

Recall Jeremiah's response to God's call:

<sup>6</sup> "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

Listen now to God's response:

**Jeremiah 1:7-10 (New International Version)**

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

That's what the HS has in mind [pause] FOR YOU.

AMEN