

So, when I got up this morning I thought it was just going to be another day, like any other. My brother and I met this guy yesterday at the fishing pier who is pretty cool and we thought we would get together today. Not much happening on a Saturday so why not. So, we met up with this guy Jess and we were just talking to some folks and having an interesting discussion when I look around and realize that there are some crazy mean people hanging out around us. Now I am not much of a fighter. I could defend myself if I had to but there was no way I was a match for this bunch. You know how when you take a flash picture and the reflection makes everyone's eyes look red and creepy? Well that is the way their eyes looked. So I elbow my brother to tell him that we need to beat feet but before he can even respond to me these guys start threatening us. Turns out they have a long time grudge with our new friend Jess. So, they want to know what Jess thinks he is doing and

does he think he is man enough to fight them. Well, even with my help and my brother I figure we are toast. These are some mean dudes...did I say that already? But Jess just stands up and tells them to be quiet. Something about his presence and the way he said it was crazy powerful. I could not believe my eyes when that gang of tough guys just backed away. I mean they were so scared they were shaking. Man, everyone has been talking about it. I am sure glad that Jess is my friend.

Good morning St. John's and good morning Lord. Thank you for your presence here among us.

There are times when we might read a Bible story and wonder how it is relevant for us today. When this happens, one of the things I enjoy doing is to re-imagine the story. To re-imagine it in a context that I can relate to. I have certainly been in situations where I was afraid. Afraid for my physical safety or even my spiritual well being.

When I lived in Maine some friends and I climbed Mt. Katahdin. Somehow we got off the path and became lost. We could look across the deep precipice and see other hikers but we could not see how to get where they were. As the day wore on we became increasingly tired and concerned. We could not see any other people. There was the feel of a change of weather in the air and there was also a sense of a spiritual unrest that was palpable. In response to this we gathered and prayed. For safety and for guidance. Within a few turns around the rocky path we spotted the marks on the rocks that served as guide for hikers. We made it to the downward path and back to our camp before darkness fell.

I imagine that each of you has been faced with the threat of loss or fear for your safety at some time in your life. It is not something that we enjoy. And when we are in the midst of it, it may seem difficult to believe that God is really there. The

presence of God in our lives sounds great but sometimes it really is difficult to believe. Much of our society would say that God is nowhere to be seen. And if we look around at all that is happening in the world...well that sentiment could make sense. Sometimes i can re-imagine God's presence But sometimes I just have to declare that I know the truth and that is that God is here. As long as we choose not to see the presence of God, it is easy to live in a fog of disbelief. When people ask where is God in my sorrow, in my loss, or even in my dying, all I can say is God is there. God is here.

So lets go back to the text and do a little Bible study about how Mark is showing us that God is indeed with us. Each of the gospels begins Jesus ministry with a significant first event. This first event sets the stage for how each gospel writer portrays the power of God's presence in the world in Jesus. Matthew begins with the sermon on the mount, because for him it is

Jesus as a teacher and the giver of a new law. John begins with the wedding at Cana where Jesus does something unexpected and brings forth a miracle of abundance by changing water into the finest wine. Luke writes about a man who preaches that will release the captives, heal the sick and proclaim good news to the poor. Mark picks a fight with evil. Mark makes Jesus power immediately known. As you read the story there is no question about which will come out ahead, good or evil. Jesus words and his power are undaunted. The spirit wastes no time challenging Jesus and Jesus wastes no time rebuking them, for the evil is multiple, into submission.

For Mark Jesus is sent to us to protect us from all that might come against us or interfere with the grace and abundance that God desires for us. This message is just as profound and true today as it was when Mark wrote it. If we are bold enough to call upon the name of Jesus when there are

things in our lives that stand between us and the joy and purpose for which we were created we have the power to cast out that evil. What possesses us in the 21st century? Is it anger or fear or our job or, or, or. The list of distractions is long. These are serious struggles and truthfully they can't all be resolved with an amen, halleluia, Jesus I'm healed. Here is what can happen. We can gather with one another knowing that God wants the best for us and in that gathering we can love and support one another. None of us can do it alone. We need each other. The miracle might not be that all our problems are solved, the miracle might be that we don't have to face the demons alone. We bless and are a blessing to each other.

Remember that God while God is present where we expect that presence, God also shows up when and where we least expect it. God is there in our joy and in our brokenness. God is there in our abundance and in our time of need. God is a

God that knows no boundaries. Mark makes it clear that in the coming of Jesus there is no compromise with evil. Evil still does damage in our lives and in our world but we have the choice whether to give the power to evil or accept the redemption of Jesus.

So, my fellow disciples, as we prepare for Lent I invite you to commit to giving up something that is causing trouble in your soul. I invite you to believe in a God whose makes the impossible possible and the unbearable, bearable. Remember where this journey of Lent will take us. it takes us to the cross and then beyond to the glory of the resurrection. My challenge to you is to take the rest of our Epiphany time, to continue to find ways in your life where God shows up. And then consider the places where you don't think God is listening to you. I treasure these words of Thomas Merton when I am not sure where God is in my life.

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

**May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you:
wherever he may send you;
may he guide you through the wilderness:
protect you through the storm;
may he bring you home rejoicing:
at the wonders he has shown you;
may he bring you home rejoicing:
once again into our doors.**