

Epiphany 4b, 2009

Text: Mark 1:21-28

Title: Jesus Talks Funny

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People will judge you based on how you speak. Your parents probably told you this. You probably told your children this. But you can tell a lot about someone based on how they speak. You can tell where someone's from based on their accent. You can tell how educated someone is based on their vocabulary. You can tell someone's mood based on their tone of voice. And people will judge you based on how you speak.

When you listen to Jesus, when you hear how He speaks, what is your reaction? The folks in today's gospel listened to Jesus and concluded one thing: Jesus talks funny.

There's no one else who talks like Jesus does. There's no mistaking Jesus' voice for someone else's. And it's not only what Jesus says, it's how Jesus says it. Jesus talks funny.

When Jesus speaks, His words always provoke a reaction. You are never the same after hearing Jesus speak. Folks either listen to what He says and their lives are changed, or they turn their backs on him. But they don't leave the same as when they came. There's no ignoring Jesus. He's bound to provoke some sort of a reaction.

Today in Capernaum, Jesus gives His first sermon. He's the guest preacher. And He teaches the people. The people probably didn't expect anything too different from this new preacher. They had been going to the same synagogue all their life. They had heard hundreds, if not thousands of sermons. They knew most of the stories by heart, and there was very little that surprised them.

But this time, things are different. Jesus doesn't talk like all the other preachers they've heard. And the people are amazed. Why? Because Jesus talks funny. He doesn't talk like all the other pastors. He doesn't talk like all the other preachers. They've never heard anyone talk like Jesus talks. What is it that makes Jesus different? What makes His sermons different than all the others?

None of the other pastors spoke on their own authority. They all relied on the authority of those who had come before them. All the others would build their cases on the words of other teachers. They would make their cases by quoting those who had gone before them, thus says Rabbi Hillel, thus says Rabbi Jonathan, thus says the prophet Isaiah, thus says Moses. But none of the other pastors would say "I". None of them would say, "I say to you." None of them would say, this what I have to say on this, that or the other thing.

And that's a good thing. The scribes and Pharisees and rabbis of Jesus' day did not have any authority to speak on their own. They had the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and God's Word was there. They had no authority to say something new.

But Jesus did. Jesus' constant refrain throughout the Sermon on the Mount was, "you have heard it said..." but I say to you ..." This is why Jesus sounds funny. That "but I say to you..." is uniquely Jesus. Only He has the authority to talk like this. Only Jesus can talk like this. Only Jesus can say things on His own authority.

How many of you have ever used the line, "because I said so"? Did you ever use that line with your kids or grandkids, when they asked the "why" questions, when they questioned your authority? When you say, "because I said so", this only works if you have the authority to say it, and the person you're talking to respects you.

It wouldn't work to talk this way to the IRS, "I'm not paying my taxes," you say. "Why not?" "Because I said so." That argument won't get you very far. In fact, it might land you in jail. Or imagine saying to your boss, "I'm not coming in to work today." "Why not?" "Because I said so." That argument won't get you very far either. In fact, it might get you fired. There are only a few situations where the "because I said so" line will work. One is with your children (and maybe not even then), another is in the military or other place that have a chain of command.

But more often than not, this line just doesn't work. Just because we say things doesn't make them happen. But it works for Jesus. He has the authority to use this line.

We see Jesus use this line with a demon. Jesus commands the demon to be silent and come out of the man. He doesn't reason with it. He doesn't argue with it. He simply says it, and it happens.

And again, the people are amazed. They are amazed because Jesus speaks with authority. He talks funny. He tells a demon to shut up and leave, and it does. They've never heard anyone talk like this before. What amazes people the most about Jesus, especially as He's getting started, is His words. He speaks with authority, and they've never heard anyone talk like Jesus before.

Jesus talks funny. He says things that sound strange. Jesus says things like "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus says things like, "Blessed are the poor, and the hungry, and those who mourn." Jesus says things like, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."

Now you've heard people say strange things before. What makes this Jesus different? What makes Him different from some raving lunatic? What makes Jesus' words different is not only what Jesus says, but how He says them. Jesus' words have authority. Jesus' words have authority because they bear His Spirit. Jesus' words are alive. Through Jesus' words the Holy Spirit gets into you and changes you, enlivens you.

Jesus' words brought creation to life with six days of "let there be." Jesus' words drew the disciples out of their boats with "follow me." Jesus' words cast out demons, healed the sick, and even raised the dead. Jesus' words still speak, still bear His Spirit, and they still sound funny.

Jesus' words say, "You are mine" to tiny babies in Holy Baptism. Jesus' words say, "You are forgiven" to poor miserable sinners in Holy Absolution. Jesus' words say, "This is my body, This is my blood" to the bread and wine in the Holy Supper.

Jesus still sounds funny, talking like that to water, to bread, to wine, and to sinners. People hear these words and are amazed. Who is this? Who talks like this?

When Jesus teaches, it's with authority as well. It's not our place to question what Jesus says and why He says it. It may not make sense, it may sound crazy, but Jesus has the authority to say these things, and we don't have the authority to contradict Him.

Think of the words spoken to you by your parents. At times they said things that probably sounded strange, funny, unreasonable. They made all sort of unreasonable rules about the chores you had to do, where you could go and who you could see. They might have even forced you to go to church with them. But your parents did this out of love.

Think of words that you have spoken to your own children. At times you've said things to your children that they thought sounded strange, funny unreasonable. What TV shows and movies they could watch. How late they could stay out and who they could see. You might have even forced them to come to church with you. But you did this out of love, because you cared for them and knew what was best for them.

Faith listens to the words of Jesus and says, "Amen." I trust you, I believe you know what's best for me.

Unfaith listens to the words of Jesus and says, "No way." Unfaith makes you the authority. Unfaith challenges Jesus' authority and does its own thing. Unfaith says to Jesus, "You say to love my enemy, but I just can't forgive him, he's hurt me too much." Unfaith says to Jesus, "You say that I should be generous with my money and give to all who ask, but I'd rather use my money to make me happy." Unfaith says to Jesus, "I've got it all figured out. I'll check in with you from time to time, but I don't really need any help right now."

If you don't receive Jesus' words as gift, as gospel, then they become law to you and condemn you. If you disobey and turn your back on Jesus, then his, "because I said so," becomes a word of judgment. "Depart from me, because I said so."

But when the words of the Lord to have their way with you, when the response to the funny words of Jesus is yes, Amen, your will be done, it sounds strange, but I trust you, then Jesus' "because I said so" becomes a glorious word for you. "Come, enter into the joys of heaven." "Why? I don't deserve it. I'm a sinful, rotten person." To which Jesus replies, "because I said so."

Jesus talks funny. His teaching amazed the people of Capernaum and it continues to amaze us today.

After listening to Jesus for awhile, you start to talk funny, too. You say things like, “I forgive you.” Out of your mouth flow words of blessing, prayers, and hymns of praise. The words of Jesus change you, and they change your words, too. His words are alive within you, and come bursting out, bubbling to the surface.

And people will judge you by what you say. To them, you’ll sound funny. But that’s a good thing. When they’re confused about why you sound funny, it’s the perfect opening to tell them about how Jesus has changed you, changed everything about you, even how you speak.

Jesus talks funny, I talk funny, we all talk funny. Thanks be to God.