

Advent 4B 2012
Mark 1:21-28
Sermon for Advent LC
January 29th, 2012

Give it up

Dear sisters and brothers grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who we wait expectantly for, Amen.

I spent part of last week in Arizona with a bunch of mission driven folks in the ELCA as part of the Summit for Evangelical Justice. The theme of the week was "Courage to Connect" and we focused our time talking about and learning about the importance of being leaders in the church that connected with the community we served. It was wonderful. One of the most inspirational parts of the entire week was our visit to a church in the inner city of Phoenix called Grace- their tag line is In the city for Good and I can testify that is exactly what they are. We were blessed to be able to connect with the ministry they do for people experiencing homelessness- and in fact interacted with some of those very people. One man, who had been homeless for the better part of 12 years shared a bit of his testimony- his name was Reid. Reid was an African American who had lost everything do to a few bad turns of luck and some bad choices. His story was amazing, but was even more amazing was the story of how Grace Lutheran Church reached out to him and how he realized he needed to give it up- it being his feeling that he could do it on his own. Grace reached out to him, met him where he was and proclaimed good news and Gospel to him when he needed it most. He says, that the people of Grace Lutheran church loved him like no one else, and that love led him to change his ways- now, drug free for 8 years he helps run the ministry of Grace to the homeless. **Reid said it best when he said, I gave it all up, and got so much in return- the love of God made real and the love of others for me without giving it all up, letting all of my stuff go I would not have been able to even begin to see God's grace in my life.** What do you have to give up friends, to get the love of God real in your life?

I believe that so often you and I are not that different from Reid- sure, we are not homeless and we probably don't have anywhere close to the same issues he has but often I bet we too need to rid ourselves of stuff, to give it all up so see God more clearly. Our Gospel today from mark is another story of someone needing to give it all up to God in order to be released to receive the goodness of the Lord in a major way. Most likely, you have not experienced an exorcism before and perhaps your only encounter with one is that dreadfully scary movie years ago. So how do we apply, this story of Jesus freeing the possessed man to our life when none of you have been possessed in that way? In this story we see the power of Christ sure, and that is good news- the promise that Christ has control over the spiritual realm. But I think we need to take it further- sure, you have not been possessed by a demon, but perhaps there are things that do possess you. For instance, on occasion I become possessed by anger when someone wrongs me or my loved ones, I have on occasion found myself possessed by envy or longing to have something I don't have that has led me to do things that certainly were not of the Spirit of God- and that's just the beginning- the reality is that sin rears its ugly head and so often becomes the norm of our lives and it

simply possesses us. What is it for you dear friends, that possesses you and takes you away from fully living in Christ- anger, frustration, fear, addiction, dishonesty- what- what is it. I think the sooner we can realize what it is that is pulling us away from God just like the demon did to that man in the Gospel the sooner we can be released by the power of Christ. The sooner we can like Reid give it all up the sooner we can receive the full bounty of God's grace in a real way and hear the precious voice of Christ calling you child. So what...what do you need to give up?

We are going to do something that you may not like- and I guess I am sorry if you don't. You should have received a piece of yarn when you came in today- if not, let us know....I want you to take a few moments and hold that yarn close to your heart- and cast whatever it is you know possesses you onto it- the fear, the guilt, the addiction, the pain, the whatever- cast it onto that yarn...and then come forward as you are able and as you want- you don't have to...but I invite you to- there is something about physically doing this thing that will release you in a new way...so because our space we will start in the front...and just let the spirit work and make our way to the back... as you come forward bring your yarn with you and drape it over the cross here- as a symbolic gesture of giving that which possesses you over to God, - cause here's the deal- at the cross is freedom, at the cross is hope and Christ went to that cross to release you from everything that binds you. So come, and give it all up...as you do, take your time and hear the words of Christ saying you are set free because of me-

After....dear sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus calls you by name and orders that which possesses you out - hear that, know that, and believe that- you have been claimed by Christ and nothing...nothing...can separate you from that- give it up...all of it not just now, but always. God loves you and so do I. Amen