

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

Year B

22nd February 2009

1. **Things we have done or haven't done or what others have or haven't done to us** can distort our lives. Some people remain sad, have low self-esteem, act continually like a victim, or distrust others so that they seem paralysed and unable to move forward in their lives. Maybe this has been your experience too at some stage of your life. Such is the power of *blame* and *guilt* of sin to constrain us.
2. **The nature of God is to liberate people** bound by the sins of the past. Isaiah 43.18-25 "I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins". God's very nature is to forgive and to make things new.
3. **The truth of God's nature is revealed in Jesus.** Mark's gospel show Jesus revealing God as the one who heals, forgives, restores and liberates. Mark 2. 1-12. "Your sins are forgiven" provoked outrage because only God can forgive sins but for Jesus healing and forgiveness were interlinked. "Do you want me to act in the power of God to heal or in the power of God to forgive?" What Jesus said freed the paralytic to move into the future. His freedom to walk was an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual truth of forgiveness.
4. **Who are you in the story of the paralysed man?** Are you so paralysed by guilt and blame that you cannot even ask for forgiveness? Are you someone going to extraordinary lengths to bring your suffering friend to Jesus? Or are you questioning in your heart that Jesus has such authority and power?
5. **In Jesus every one of God's promises is a Yes,** Paul reminds us (2 Cor. 1.16-22). Through him we say *Amen* to the absolution offered to us. (see p.120 APBA)

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Year B

1st February 2009

1. **Every new teacher is given authority** in the classroom to teach and discipline. Children learn very quickly that they must accept and take up that authority or their classes will be uncontrollable and unteachable. You can give teachers authority but they still will be unauthoritative unless they develop their own moral authority to which children respond. You might think of others who speak and act with authority: doctors, experts in any field, policemen and judges. We all know they are given authority by someone higher, but they need to speak and act with authority for acceptance, and in turn we must also give them authority over us.
2. **Today we focus on Jesus' authority.** Last week we saw Jesus' calling the disciples. His call was authoritative and authentic and so they responded. And today (Mark 1.21-28) he enters the synagogue and taught 'as one having authority'. Somehow this man's teaching had something extra which the teaching of the scribes lacked. "Just then" Mark says, a possessed man entered the synagogue and the evil spirit within him recognized Jesus for who he was. "I know who you are, he says. Now to others, this evil spirit would have been a fearful thing. Not so for the Holy One. He rebuked the spirit and cast him out. The people first astounded by Jesus' teaching were now amazed at his power and recognized his authority, an authority which could only have come from God. No doubt in their minds would be the teaching in the Torah which we heard in Deuteronomy 18.15-20. here was a new prophet who spoke with the authority of God and whose actions proved it.
3. **How do we see the authority of Jesus?** Do we see Jesus as being given authority by his Father? Do we hear him speaking authoritatively in our lives? Do we see his authoritative actions in the world? Do we give him authority over us? We pray 'Lord Jesus Christ', perhaps even without thinking. But we need to ask ourselves what that concept of Lordship means today. In ancient and medieval time, the authority of one's lord was paramount, the subjects of the lord responding with loyalty and obedience. In our world, authorities are suspect. However, we still respond to those whose moral authority is such that we listen, and follow their example and advice. In a world where rejection of authority leaves many dependent on their own devices, we pray that we might accept willingly Christ's authority in our lives, and that our example might witness to others that Christ is our light.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Year B

8th February 2009

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Year B

15th February 2009

- 1. How big is our God?** The enthusiastic poetry of Isaiah (Isa.40.21-31) captures the wonder, excitement and the hugeness of God in memorable world pictures. God is so big that all the oceans fit in his palm. The powerful nations of the earth are like a drop in a bucket or dust which weighs nothing. We are like grasshoppers!. He is strong, everlasting, tireless, complete in his understanding.
 - 2. Yet this powerful, Creator has time for us.** “He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.” This good news becomes a reality in the person of Jesus. Mark presents Jesus doing just that in his first chapter. Today’s gospel, Mark 1.29-39 shows the lifting up of the sick, the casting out of demons. Mark does not bother with birth stories and explanations about Jesus. He is anxious to get to the point quickly. Jesus spoke and acted authoritatively. He broke into creation with creative power giving to little people, the sick and the demon-possessed.
 - 3. Jesus himself was** enthusiastic about the liberation he was bringing to the ill and demon-possessed. The people greeted him with enthusiasm—” the whole city was gathered around the door”; “everyone is searching for you”. Jesus himself was anxious to move on to the neighbouring towns in Galilee to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God and to be good news himself in his liberating power.
 - 4. In Paul we meet another enthusiast.** He’ll do anything to spread the good news about Jesus. He says “I have become all things to all people” in order to win them over for the sake of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9.16-23)
 - 5. How big is our God?** How enthusiastic are we for the sake of the gospel? How willing are we to mix with people unlike ourselves in order to share with them the blessings of Christ? How willing are we to tell how great God is?
- 1. We all know about dress codes.** –no singlets or thongs etc. Hotels, clubs, SACA grounds all impose codes in order to preserve perceived standards. How awful it feels to be turned away because you have not measured up. Spoken or unspoken codes apply in many areas of life.
 - 2. The Temple had its own code** of holiness. Ritual cleanness was regulated to preserve the purity of the Temple and those who worshipped there. Lepers were ritually unclean and outcast. There were stringent rules to prevent contagion, and certification from a priest was necessary before a healed leper could participate in society. The leper’s approach to Jesus was forbidden by the Law. (Mark 1. 40-45)
 - 3. So why did Jesus break the Law?** “If you choose, you can make me clean,” said the leper. He had seen Jesus’ compassionate and authoritative dealings with illness and demon-possession. He probably guessed Jesus’ response - “moved with pity” and he knew from the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5.1-14) that healing came from trusting in the word of a man of God. Compassion was Jesus’ code, not holiness.
 - 4. Which code do we follow:** the code of holiness or the code of compassion? When do we as individuals or as a Church touch the ‘untouchables’ of our community? Will we welcome people to mingle among us only when they wear the right clothes or behave in the right way? The noisy child in church? People of different backgrounds? Those in need of food and clothing?
 - 5. In the Collect for today we pray** for the gifts of compassion and self control that in serving others we may receive the reward of eternal life (the imperishable wreath—1 Cor. 9.24-27) Compassion is our code.