

**Sunday, February 1, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - 'Who Are You?'**

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In the movie 'Flight' Denzel Washington plays an alcoholic, drug-addicted airline pilot who miraculously lands a malfunctioning plane.

The story traces his struggle with addiction juxtaposed on his media fame as a hero.

The movie ends with him sitting at a picnic table in prison across from his estranged teenage son.

The son looks him in the eye and says, "So who are you?"

*Who are you?*

This is a question that we are rarely asked.

People might inquire what we do, or where we live, but 'Who are you' is just too personal and probing for casual conversation.

It is also something that we really don't know the answer to.

Most of us spend our whole lives learning more about ourselves – realizing that we have gifts we didn't recognize or fears we never imagined.

There is the external you – the one that we all see and the internal one –the one that only you know.

Each one holds a different kind of power, one from the outside, and the other from within.

For many people, there is a tension between these two.

They present one face to the public and another to themselves.

Their doubts and insecurities undermine their ability to be authentic.

It is often the imbalance of the two selves that gets public figures in trouble.

Something happens which reveals a 'true' self and the outward façade is stripped away.

It is only when we genuinely know who we are, when our internal sense of self and external self are in balance that we are able to speak with authority.

We are drawn to people who are genuine.

Jesus was confident that he could answer the question, "Who are You?"

Imagine how many times he must have been asked that question.

Certainly the disciples must have asked it when he called them to walk away from their lives and follow him.

We know that the Pharisees and religious leaders will ask it over and over again.

Mark's gospel is committed to answering this question for Jesus.

In just this first chapter we have heard that Jesus is 'the Son of God,' 'one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit,' and 'the beloved with whom God is well pleased.'

Though Mark doesn't include it, in John's gospel Andrew reports to his brother Simon, "we have found the Messiah."

In today's reading the man possessed by demons cries out during worship – "I know who you are – the Holy One of God."

Jesus himself does not answer this question for quite a while.

It is not until the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark, the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke and the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew that Jesus, in response to his own question, "who do you say that I am?" acknowledges that he is indeed the Messiah.

Today's reading tells us that when Jesus spoke in the temple the people are astounded at his teaching;

that 'he taught them as one having authority.'

What comes to mind when you hear the word 'authority'?

Jesus knew what he was talking about.

He believed in what he was saying.

He was authentic, genuine, real.

Jesus' authority amazed people, largely because it was a different kind of authority than any they had known.

It was the authority of liberation - setting oppressed people free.

It was also the authority of service - healing, forgiving, restoring service.

For Jesus authority is not domination or "power over".

Nor is it manipulation or "hidden power".

For Jesus authority is collaboration or "power with".

It is an authority derived from God's power, and it's one in which we are invited to participate.

One of the reasons Jesus made such an impact on people is that he practiced what he preached.

When he proclaimed that God's kingdom was available and accessible, he showed it to be true by his actions.

When he embraced the leper, healed the sick and cast out demons, Jesus was showing that a new reality really was being manifest in the world.

What Jesus taught and how he lived were in complete alignment, and this meant that his message had authority.

The interesting twist in today's passage is that it is the demon who recognizes Jesus and his divine authority.

Demons in scripture are code words for evil – things that take over people's lives and cause them to act in ways that are dangerous, unacceptable in community, crippling in some way.

Jesus has the power to transform these people.

He is able to call out the demon and set the person free.

There are many such stories in scripture.

Who has the power to do that today?

Do you need divine power to exorcise someone's demons?

I would argue that each one of us has been given that same divine power.

Each one of us has the authority to use the power of our love, compassion, understanding, and kindness to set another person free.

When we were in Bridgeport last month helping with the community dinner I had the job of handing out the dessert, peach cobbler with ice cream, to each person who came through the line.

I made a point of doing it slowly so that I could look each person in the eye and engage them in some way – to let them know that I saw them, I noticed them, they had worth.

This is the same approach that we heard described last week by Simply Smiles founder Bryan Nurnberger and celebrated earlier this month in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Well, when you do that – when you put aside all of your own judgments, all of your own preconceptions about who someone is you find that they are set free to discover themselves.

In the process, you are likely to come closer to answering the question “Who are you?”

One of the reasons we gather as a community of faith is to explore these questions for ourselves.

The sacrament of Communion, which we just shared, is a reminder and remembrance of who Jesus was and is in our lives.

Scripture tells us “he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Our sharing of that bread and that cup answers part of the question, ‘who are you?’

By participating in this holy meal, you identify yourself as a person seeking the peace that Christ offers.

By participating in this holy meal you remember that Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

We share communion together, to remind us that we are one – the body of Christ.

My professor at Hartford Seminary, Scott Thumma, is nationally recognized for his work: studying congregations.

Earlier this week he was describing the type of questions he asks people when he is trying to get a feel for their church.

He said that the first question he asks people is “Who are you?”

Who are you, Congregational Church of Salisbury?

His follow up question is, ‘How do people know that?’

In the weeks ahead I urge you to reflect on this question.

Who are you?

As you ponder your insights, ask yourself the follow up question – do people know that?

As we journey through Lent together this year, let’s be asking ourselves “Who are we?” and “Do people know that?”

My friends, we are invited to live in a kingdom where God reigns, where Jesus is the authority to whom we are accountable

where the holy spirit moves within and among us.

Let us embrace that invitation, move into that kingdom where we can live freely, at peace with our genuine selves.