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What Have You To Do With Us, Jesus?

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Text: Mark 1:21-28 (B – Epiphany 4)

Do you know WHO you are?

I don't mean the usual labels people generally use that are based on "the job" or on one's social status in the "pecking order." These labels are just the incidentals of history.

I mean, "Who are you, REALLY?"

I heard about a guy in Edmonton who got an answer he didn't expect.

Seems he and his wife were waiting in line to renew his driver's license. He was a wealthy man, known to many in the community, having done well in the stock market in the 1980s and '90s. He was getting very impatient with how long it was taking (government office and all!). Finally he complained to his wife, "I haven't got time for this! Don't they KNOW WHO I AM?"

"Sure they do, dear," his wife said. "They know you're a plumber *who got lucky!*"

So who are you, really? Do you know?

Actually, this question comes up for us today because it arises from another question that is asked in the Gospel Reading. It is a key question asked by the demon-possessed man, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?"

This is a question raised by those who are wracked by *spiritual tension* at the core of their lives.

These are persons who reach a point in life where they are *possessed* by compelling forces which eventually *take over who they are!* When that happens, it becomes a frightening time in one's life – as some of you know well, who have struggled with addictions!

Our younger generations today are especially vulnerable to compelling forces. They live in such a pluralistic culture that they have difficulty developing a *consistent and stable identity*.

They're pulled in so many directions by the many "scenes" they drift in and out of in the course of a week. Their world is like a flea-market of endless values and habits – in which most people seem morally indifferent. The world seems to be saying, "Take your pick, it doesn't matter!" In this flea-market of exciting options, youth tend to get addicted to bigger and bigger thrills. After all, already at an early age they have many chances to experience today's "culture of desire." So much so, in fact, that some society-watchers call today's generations "Sensation Gatherers!" Unfortunately, the "thrills" and "spills" they scramble to gather don't come with labels telling them, "This product may be hazardous to your spiritual health." Even when they do, it's too late! Because now they are *possessed!*

That is, they feel *compelled* to "Just Do It" – as the NIKE ad tells them. Just do it for the thrill of it.

Consequently, more and more of our people today don't know who they are, nor what they are about!

They long to have a *heroic* character like the super-models or movie icons playing it "cool" on TV. Since they have no budding identity, they are vulnerable to *imitating* whatever "hero" happens to strut closest to the "thrilling life" they fancy today.

A short story by Sartre helps us see this. Called *Childhood of a Leader*, the story opens with a student, Lucien, mulling over his very ordinary and *un-thrilling* life. He longs to "be somebody" – like a popular student he knows on campus. This student seems to be a "man of conviction," especially in his hatred of Jews. Although Lucien cares little one way or another about Jews, he decides that he, too, will become anti-Semitic. Amazingly, Lucien soon draws attention to himself as a person with con-

viction, albeit, a negative one. He discovers that this person he has created of himself has real *force*. He gets respect from his parents, his friends, and his girl. Now he *is* somebody! Sartre ends the story playfully with Lucien deciding that now he will grow a mustache.

Unfortunately, it seems the fast pace of life today, and the indifference to any and all moral markers in public life, mean that most people do not think much about spiritual direction for their lives. Few people take the time to ask, "What are the spiritual forces driving my life?" and "Who or what makes me who I am today?" Yet these are such critical questions – especially today when we live in a culture of many gods.

Roger Merrill tells about a wealthy businessman who wanted to landscape his large estate. But he was so busy with his business, his travel, and just enjoying all the options available to him that he didn't have time to do all the landscaping and to care for his large estate himself. So he asked an acquaintance – a woman with a doctorate in horticulture – if she would design a wonderful garden over these acres. But he wanted a garden which required *no maintenance* on his part, since he was so busy. He wanted automatic sprinklers and all the latest labor-saving devices. Finally the horticulturalist stopped him. "One thing has to be made clear," she said. "If there is going to be no *gardener*, there will be no garden!"¹

Friends, that's also true of our human spirit.

Without proper maintenance from "the gardener" the "garden of our personhood" will fall victim to the many "noxious weeds" or "toxic potions" of our indulgent culture. And Jesus is that "gardener" who comes knocking and asking to care for our spirit, for our mind, and for our heart.

You see, it is Jesus – at the centre of the Body of Christ – *he it is who defines who we are!*

So the question in our Gospel *is* central for all of us: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" The answer is, "EVERYTHING!"

Jesus has everything to do with us because *his caring* is what helps us become who we are intended to be right from the act of creation. Jesus is the gardener who nurtures our gifts so that they will bear the

“fruits of the Spirit” in the lives of others. Jesus is also the one who comes into our lives and helps drive out the “demons” that sometimes threaten to, or in fact do, “possess us” and rob us of who we are truly meant to be!

In the end, perhaps it is not so important for you to “know who you are” or for me to “know who I am,” since God is not really through with us yet.

We are still *becoming*, as it were, no matter what our age. God is not through creating who you are. As the Apostle Paul became “many things to many people,” so might you also, for God is not through with you yet!

The important thing for you is to *know who it is that guides your life!* To know and make sure that it’s Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, who directs your life.

This means you are not just a “lucky accident” of history, but a *beloved child of God* with a purpose.

“While I was still in the womb,” Jeremiah said, “God named me and made me God’s own.” Or, as Paul says, “Once we were ‘no people’, but now we are ‘God’s people.’” That makes me “Somebody!” Yes, I am a lucky somebody, alright. But it was no accident! I was a *planned somebody*, planned by the loving act of God!

You, too, can say that since you too are born of a loving God. You can say, “I am SOMEBODY!”

So let’s say it together: “I AM SOMEBODY!”

NOTE

¹ Ed Rowell, ed., *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (1997) 146.