

Sermon February 4 – Mark 1:21-28 –“When the Holy One of God Speaks”

We set the stage for Jesus to leave his hometown of Nazareth and travel to Jordan. Then Jesus met John, The Baptist, and John baptized him. It is here at this moment where the event of Jesus’ baptism is significant, setting the stage for the beginning of Jesus' teaching and confirming his identity as the Messiah. Then Jesus is led by Satan into the desert for 40 days, where he is tempted. John gets arrested, and then near Bethsaida, Jesus calls his first disciples, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, to follow him. We pick up the story in verse 21, where Jesus arrives in Capernaum to begin his teaching in the region of Galilee by the sea, a place that became Jesus’ headquarters during his Galilean ministry. Here begins the opening of Jesus’ public ministry.

At the end of a busy week, we naturally come to church on the Sabbath day awash in differing emotions amid a weariness of mental states. On this particular day, it was no different for Jesus as he entered the synagogue, as was his custom. Maybe as we eat breakfast that morning, sitting around the table, the kids are getting on our nerves, listening to them as they pick on each other, or perhaps the week has been so much of a mess that we have a hard time setting our minds on listening to the liturgy and then set off to a meal at home or out to lunch. Come on, kids, shape up; we are going to church—a natural habit for many to seek an hour or so of peace. You notice a guest pastor is in the house, and you begin to wonder who this person is and where he is from. In this story of the Sabbath day, the Jews of Capernaum did as they naturally did and went to the synagogue. They came because, among other things, it was their habit to do so. For as long as they could remember, they had gone to the synagogue on the Sabbath morning. It was the expected thing to do. Mark is in a hurry and constantly moving the action along, but I do not want to hurry as Mark, so before I continue with an expected thing to do, let’s pray.

Christ Jesus, we come before you today and ask for protection from the spirit of corruption. We pray that everything we do, in word or deed, is done for you. Please help us to be faithful in all things. Protect us from the devil, who will try to manipulate us into straying for your will. Jesus, Your Scripture says: “The devil entered Judas,” then he betrayed you. Jesus, we ask that you help us to drive every spirit of immorality, dishonesty, and deception out of our lives. In your holy name, we pray, Amen.

In this story, and on that particular morning, Jesus of Nazareth was there, and his presence would create a worship service no one would ever forget. Jesus stood up as some guest pastor that day, and few, if any, had ever heard of him before. Once they looked into the bulletin, they saw he was initially from Nazareth. Nazareth? Like any service, it consisted of prayer, praise, and reading of Scripture, and in the custom of the synagogue, guests were invited to speak on the Scripture of the day. Jesus took the opening, and when he began to teach, they noticed something different from the usual ideas and vocabulary of the usual Rabbi. Instead, there was something about his presence. Something that made them sit up straighter. Even the teenagers couldn’t help but perk up, slouching a bit less and listening more closely than they would care to admit. The Jews were amazed. Jesus struck his hearers like thunder as if his teaching was saving them. Here was this new radical type of teacher that met their eyes and ears, not like the expected Dr. Dry-As-Dust, whom they expected to hear from that day. The crowd

was so amazed at his teaching, wondering in amazement at the gracious words which fell from his lips. However, in the buzz of excitement, Jesus aroused the irritation of an unclean spirit under the power of Satan as he spoke in the sense of power of authority and right.

This man had “authority.” He had a moral substance to him that people found difficult to explain. He began talking about God’s kingdom, a message proclaiming he was the same as if the time had come near. The people could not put their finger on it, and in their amazement, they began to whisper. Who is this man? Imagine taking your bulletin and pointing out the name of the guest preacher to the person next to you. Who is this man? What seminary did he go to? Where did he come from? Then, something extraordinary began to happen, and from the back pew, a noise came forth. WHHHHHHHHHAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH! People’s blood ran cold as the demon controlled the man’s vocal cords. The word of God from the lips of Jesus acted like a sword that pierced the demon. That is what happens when we are armed with the spiritual weapon of God’s Word of Truth.

What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to wipe us out already? I know who you are; you are the Holy One of God! Be quiet, Jesus commanded, and you could sense that everyone there was glad he said it because it was bone chilling and on the tip of their tongues, too. You can’t tolerate that kind of thing in church. Quick, get the ushers and get over there fast to bring this sadly crazed person to the narthex. Everyone was probably thinking, “Be quiet!” They were glad Jesus said it out loud. But then, something amazing happened. “Come out of him!” No sooner were those words out of Jesus’ mouth when the man convulsed. He shook like a leaf in a violent wind before shrieking one last time and then collapsed into a heap. Suddenly, the man was better, and the fire had gone out of his eyes, and a calm look came over him.

I can only sense that their minds no longer wandered with their previous thoughts of the morning. Did they forget about their week or the kids picking at each other over the breakfast table? It was not the typical worship service, and this time in the worship service, the people would usually begin to drift to other things, like will they get home on time enough to keep the pot roast from drying out and the kids are behaving. Nope! Not today! No one’s mind wandered, and no one turned thoughts to the typical, for they had encountered Jesus, and he was all they could talk about for a long time to come.

By the time they returned home from the Synagogue, the people had this overwhelming sense they had been in the very presence of God in a way that was anything but typical, that the Son of God would be present that day, too. The thing is that we, as Christians, come to church each week, and we do know that the Son of God will be present through the Holy Spirit. But do we expect that this living presence of the Almighty God will shake us up? Brothers and sisters, we should expect it if, and only if, we pay attention to the authority of Jesus.

The authority of Jesus is a central theme in Mark, for Jesus says that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” As I previously mentioned, Mark is always in a hurry to tell the story, and maybe he has a point that we should be in a hurry to get the message of the kingdom out to others before it is too late. Jesus was bringing something radically new to the

newness of the kingdom, leading to the breaking of old wineskins. In a worldly sense, Jesus did not have any power at all. He was not a worldly king with political or military power. He was not Dr. Dry-As-Dust's teacher or one of the priests who had power in Roman Judea, nor was he a scribe with the authority of Jewish tradition. No, Jesus' authority lay in his living as God's servant, bringing health and blessings to people in a way that drew people to the gifts he gave. Think about the example of Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday was recently celebrated. Martin Luther King was a man whose authority lay in his words and deeds, whose call for change was disputed in his own time, but the moral decency of whose call for change has been vindicated in subsequent history.

How different from the conception of power and authority in our politics! Now, in the midst of a presidential election campaign, our politicians try to manipulate our votes. They say one thing and do another. They use their authority for self-promotion. They look for short-term gain, even if that means doing the wrong thing, rather than doing the right thing and trusting that in the long term, history (not to mention God) will vindicate them. Will the future be any different?

We should be aware that demonic forces are very much at work in our world today, although sometimes they are given more credit than they deserve. The world and the flesh are usually quite capable of dragging us into sin without demonic influence. The Holy Spirit dwells within believers and thus cannot be possessed by demons, but believers can come under attack and opposition, and thus, we must constantly discern. But here is a fact. The demons know who Jesus is. **"I know who you are. The Holy One of God, Jesus of Nazareth."** Here is a thought. Has your holy life had that similar effect on the unsaved in your sphere of influence? I mean, I've noticed folks change their language when I am around, not because I am so good or holy, but because of the One in me who alone is Holy and pleasing, and then they apologize if a curse word accidentally slips out of their mouth. Remember, we might be the only Bible those around us will ever read!

In verse 28, we read, "As soon as Jesus healed the man with the unclean spirit, his fame spread like wildfire. It was said that the words of Martin Luther were carried as by the wings of angels, so speedily was everything that he said and wrote made known far and wide. We, too, should be amazed at such a Savior who can break every chain of sin.

As we come to a close, during the early ministry of Jesus, he encountered many demons, but none of them were a match for the power of Christ. Demons, as spirit beings, can take possession of a physical body, and this occurs when a demon completely controls a person's body. This cannot happen to a child of God since the Holy Spirit resides in the heart of the believer in the amazing grace of Christ. Satan and his demons look to destroy the work of God and deceive anyone they can. Demons are unclean spirits, lying spirits, and angels of Satan here to deceive the world. Demons spread false doctrine and attack Christians. As we submit to God and resist the devil, we have nothing to fear. In 1 John 4:4, John reminds us that "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Amen.