

January 29, 2006

"Jesus' Words Have Power"

MARK 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching-- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Words have power. The chef on a television infomercial slices and dices with Japanese knives. He tells you how these knives can help you prepare delicious meals and even open a can in a pinch. Only \$29.95! Extra knives will be included! You almost pick up the phone, dial the 800 number and order the knives. Well chosen words delivered with excitement can lead you to buy things you ordinarily would never think of buying.

Words have power. The book of Proverbs tells us that "words kill and words make alive." You can destroy the life of a child or a spouse in marriage by using cruel and harsh words. Words of love and kindness and tenderness build up your child and encourage your husband or wife. Kind words spoken to someone you don't even know can change their day and bring a smile to their face. People still read the book, "How To Win Friends and Influence People" because it teaches you how to approach people and say the right things to them to lead them to trust in you.

When people heard Jesus speak, they were amazed at his teaching. They turned to each other and said, "No one has ever spoken like this before." The words of Jesus were spoken with pure love. They contained the power to change the lives of people. Jesus said, "My words are spirit and they are life." What Jesus said about his words is true of all the words in the Bible. The book of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

This morning we want to take a trip back in time and listen to Jesus as he teaches in the synagogue. We want to realize that the power Jesus showed in his teaching is still with us today every time we open the Bible.

1) His words bring life to people

Jesus went to Capernaum his favorite city in Galilee. "And when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." If you were to travel to Israel, you can still see ancient ruins of a synagogue built in Capernaum. If you type "Capernaum synagogue"

and search the Internet you can see actually pictures of these ancient ruins. That is where Jesus began his teaching, along the Sea of Galilee, where most of the people lived in darkness and unbelief. Demon possession prevailed.

What was worship like at Jesus time? They read from the Old Testament prophets, sing some the psalms, and then read from the Torah, one of the books of Moses. A qualified rabbi or teacher then expounded on the words and lead the people in prayer. Our Lutheran liturgical worship service has its roots in the synagogue worship at Jesus' time. Jesus was chosen to lead the teaching on the Sabbath. He was the great prophet predicted by Moses. When the people heard Jesus explain the Scriptures it says, "They were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority." I am amazed at how often the New Testament tells us that people were amazed at Jesus teaching. The word for amazed comes from striking something rather forcefully, such as striking with a sword. They were literally struck by Jesus teaching, awestruck and taken aback because it had such authority.

What made Jesus' teaching so different? The teachers of the law focused their teaching on what you had to do to make yourself acceptable to God. God had given the Old Testament people different rules and regulations to make them different from other people. They were not allowed to work on the Sabbath and not allowed to eat certain foods. The Lord wanted the people from whom the Messiah would come to be different and special. The religious teachers or rabbis added extra laws to the laws God had given. Any time you add something to what God has given you take away from it. Supplement what God gives and you supplant it.

Can't you hear the rabbis going on and on about various different interpretations on what constituted working on the Sabbath day? What was clean or kosher food? What were reasons for divorce? Always quoting various different rabbis. A few years ago I heard Dr. Laura explain Yom Kippur as "the day of atonement" a day when you think of someone you have hurt, ask their forgiveness and thus earn your atonement and peace with God. That was the teaching of the rabbis not the Bible. When you read Leviticus 16 you discover the day of the atonement had a much higher purpose. The priest sprinkled blood on the ark of the covenant on the day of atonement. That pictured the blood of the Messiah who was coming to make atonement for us. Such interpretations totally miss the point of God's salvation and put it back into the hands of the people.

What was different about Jesus' teaching? The book of Mark says, "Jesus went about preaching the good news of the kingdom of God." He told them he was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, pictured vividly by all the sacrifices made in the temple at Jerusalem. He told them how God wanted to come into their lives with his love and rescue them from their sin. He spoke about God as his heavenly Father and said, "I and the Father are one." People had their breath taken away because Jesus said he was Son of God from all eternity. He always spoke with urgency. He told the people the time to believe and accept this salvation today and not tomorrow.

I am holding in my hand some books. Here is a book on how to fix one of my cars. Here is a book on how to do masonry. Here is a cookbook. All of these books have something in common. They tell me how I can do something to make food, or build a wall, or repair a car. The synagogues in Galilee were filled with rabbis who told the people how they could

fix their lives and make themselves acceptable to God by following Old Testament laws and extra laws made up by the rabbis.

When Jesus spoke to people he told them they could not fix their own lives. No one every spoke with such conviction as Jesus did when he said, "Love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." He told people that to be loved by God they needed to be perfect. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus did not use little bandaids for the problem of sin as the teachers of the law had done. He showed people how sick they were and how sin was going to drag them down to eternal death and punishment. It was Jesus who proclaimed himself as the hope of forgiveness and peace with God. Imagine the conviction in his voice as he says to man who thinks he can save himself. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The words from Jesus have power, even when we read them today. God has given us a promise that whenever we open the Word and read it or gather around the word as we are doing today, he will come to us and bless us. "So is the word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty. It will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

2) His words defeat the devil

Now lets look at how Jesus demonstrates the power of his words by overcoming the power of Satan. As Jesus was speaking, a man possessed by an evil spirit cries out, "What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God." The book of James tell us that the devils believe and tremble. They know who their master is. They recognize Jesus as Lord and God, but they will do everything possible to discredit Jesus and hurt the people he loves.

Did you ever realize how much the devil loves to go to church? He cannot be in every place at once as God can. But he can have evil spirits in every church service in this country on any given Sunday morning. Jesus once told the story of the sower and the seed. Some of the seed fell along the path and was eaten by the birds of the air. Jesus said, "Those along the path are those who hear, and then devil comes and takes away the words from their hearts, so that they cannot be saved." I have met people who said they will never come to church because if they do, the roof will fall on them. I have heard people say they do not want to gather in church to hear God's Word because the church is too full of hypocrites. Where do you think people get these ideas? The devil puts it into their head and into their thinking.

The evil spirits were no match for Jesus. He uses the power of his Word to quiet the evil spirits and put them in their place. "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" He speaks to the evil spirits as you might speak to silence a barking dog. The evil spirits knew their master for its says, "The evil spirits shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." I have always wondered what that sound was like, that shrieking sound, of an evil spirit being throttled and defeated by Jesus. In his great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" Martin Luther wrote: "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This

world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him."

How many evil spirits are in this room right now? We don't know. We do know we can overcome them by the Word of God. One little word can fell them. According to the Revelation Satan and his minions of evil spirits accuse us day and night before God's throne. But then it goes on to say that we overcome him "by blood of the Lamb and the word of the testimony." When Satan raises doubts or accuses us of a sin, we can use one little word to stop his accusing finger. "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from "All" sin. That little word "All" never loses its power.

Another week looms in the front of us. Satan is still the same hungry roaring lion looking for people to devour. We don't have to be afraid, because we have the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Listen to the words of Jesus here in the Bible. Love them. Live them. They have not lost their power. Amen.