

January 29, 2012

Epiphany 4

*"We Get to Be in Church with Jesus"*

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### **MARK 1:21-28**

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**T**hey went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup> Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> "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!" <sup>25</sup> "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Picture yourself sitting in the small synagogue in Capernaum listening to Jesus for the first time in your life. It was not a very big room, probably not much larger than our fellowship hall. The synagogue was the place where you gathered on the Sabbath day to hear the Old Testament read and listened to rabbis or teachers expound on the latest thoughts of other rabbis.

This day is different because Jesus is with you in your worship. He stands up and speaks the truths of God's Word and the good news of the kingdom of God with authority and power. You are amazed at his teaching. This day is different because a man with an evil spirit stands up and denounces Jesus with the words "I know who you are-the Holy One of God!" You are even more amazed when Jesus speaks sternly to the evil spirit, "Be quiet!" He throws the evil spirit out of the man. The devil shakes the man violently and he leaves with a shriek. You are so amazed at what you experienced in that tiny little synagogue that you are compelled by love to tell as many people as possible what you just experienced.

Here we are today not in a synagogue in Capernaum but Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Santa Maria, California. You are here in church with Jesus. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When you listen to the words of Jesus found here on the pages of the Bible they are unlike anything else you will ever hear about religion. All other religions offer you a plan on how you can leave your mark or footprint on this earth with the hope that God will accept you when you die. This is the only religion in the world that has Jesus standing up and saying: "I am your King and I have come to rescue you by giving my life for you on the cross." These words of Jesus are so powerful that they can chase the devil out of your life and send him packing.

### **Jesus' words have great power**

Jesus was always looking for opportunities to talk to people. One place he did this was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. "They went to Capernaum, and when they Sabbath

came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." If you were to travel to Israel and visit Capernaum, you can see the ruins of a synagogue that was built about 500 years after Jesus' time. Underneath that synagogue is evidence of a foundation from a much smaller synagogue, probably the one that was there at the time of Jesus. Jesus loved going through the villages and towns talking to people about the kingdom of God. He wanted people to know that he was their King who had come to rescue them the way a shepherd rescues a lost sheep.

"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." Jesus taught differently than the teachers of the law. The teachers of the law were fond of taking Old Testament laws and then adding their own spin to what God's Word said. Over the years the opinions of various different rabbis were discussed more than the Word of God just as happens in Judaism today. For example, Jewish rabbi's determined that a Sabbath day's journey was about three miles. You could walk three miles without breaking the Sabbath. But then another group of rabbis said you could walk another three miles if established residency at the end of the three mile trip. You could do this by having someone place something from your house at the end of the three miles, allowing you to travel another three miles. Jesus said of these false teachers that they strained out gnats and swallowed camels. They become so focused on the outward keeping of the law, they totally ignored the corruption that existed in their hearts. He said of these people, "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence."

Jesus often began his teaching with the words, "I tell you the truth." Remember the old King James Version with the words, "Verily, I say unto you." When Jesus spoke about the love our heavenly Father has for us he did it with such power and conviction that it left people amazed at his teaching. Think of the power in the simple words of Jesus, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus said of his own words, "My words are spirit and they are life."

Please let me illustrate how the words of Jesus were different by telling about a book we used to read to the children when they were small. The book was "The Little Engine that Could." None of the big engines wanted to take the toys over the mountain to the children on the other side. The little engine volunteered for the big task. As the engine goes up the mountain, it says, "I think I can, I think I can." The teachers of the law told the people, "Here is what you need to do to put yourself in a position where maybe God will love you and respect you." The people went home saying, "I think I can, I think I can."

Jesus taught with authority. He amazed people by telling them the truth that there was nothing they could do on their own to enter the kingdom of God and be loved by God. He told stories about a lost son and lost sheep and a lost coin to help people see he had come to rescue them and save them. He spoke these amazing words to people like Zacchaeus, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost." When Jesus talked about his heavenly Father he did it with such conviction and authority the people realized they were actually having God speak to them. The teachers of the law said, "Here is what you need to do to earn a place in the kingdom. Jesus said, "It is my Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

When we gather for worship here in this church week after week, we want Jesus to stand up and speak to us. It is amazing how Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to his disciples to help them remember what he said and write it down correctly. In John 14 Jesus says, "I will send the Holy Spirit the Comforter who will teach you all things and bring all things into your memory." So we began our worship with the hymn, "Blessed Jesus at your Word, We are gathered all to hear you, Let our hearts and souls be stirred, Now to seek and love and fear you. By your teachings sweet and holy draw from earth to love you solely." Every time we open the Bible to read we should shake our head in amazement because the Lord is coming to us and speaking to us and taking us out of this world to himself.

### **The words of Jesus send the devil packing**

Did you know that devil loves to come to church with you every Sunday? He was there when Jesus stood up in the synagogue to teach. "Just then a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "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!" It has been said that when people are demon possessed the voice of the devil does not come from the mouth but the body. It had to be a most hideous, frightening voice that suddenly spoke out in that small group of people gathered around to hear Jesus. The region around the Sea of Galilee, the land of darkness, seemed to have greater problems with demon possession. It says of Jesus that he went around teaching, performing miracles and casting out evil spirits.

Jesus wastes no time shutting the mouth of this evil spirit that is disrupting the worship in the synagogue. "Be quiet," said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The words of Jesus were so powerful it says that "The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." I believe I am safe in saying that no horror movie today can duplicate the awful sound of this evil spirit shrieking as it leaves this man. The evil spirit leaves the man but not without shaking him violently. Satan never leaves people without giving them one more shot, one more rap, one more shake, one more attempt at trying to discourage or make life miserable.

I have in my hand a book from my library with the title "The World, the Flesh and the Devil." Here is an excerpt about Satan. "Wherever there is mischief afoot, Satan is sure to be involved. He is the one who precipitates wars, encourages people in their lusts, causes them to question the Word of God, and tells them they can play with sin and win. He stands by every drunkard's side. ...He watches over the shoulder of every thief. He feeds words into the mouth of every blasphemer. He controls the mind and thoughts of every pornographer. He sits beside the statesmen in the chancelleries of the world as they decide the destiny of nations.... He laughs silently besides the graves of his victims and claps with glee when they slide into eternity without the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

We can understand how Satan is right there in the mind of the suicide bomber, but could it be that he also comes with us to church? Jesus called the devil the father of lies. 2 Corinthians tells us he masquerades like an angel of light. The name devil means liar. He whispers into our ears and tempts us to sin. In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus says the seed that falls on the path are those "who hear and then the devil comes and takes away the words from their hearts so they cannot be saved." The Revelation tells us that Satan accuses us day and night before God's throne. He can certainly find

more than enough bad in your life and mine to show that we are not worthy of God's love.

But we have Jesus, here right now with us to turn back the devil's accusing finger and break it off. The Revelation says, "They overcome him by blood of the Lamb and word of their testimony." The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from ALL sin." With the power of his Word Jesus sends the devil backing. With the power of his Word we are assured that nothing, even angels and demons, can separate us from his love. Every week we get to go to church with Jesus and hear his Word and see his power. What a blessing that is for us. Amen.