

Epiphany 4
February 1, 2015

"Jesus Words Have Authority"

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.

People were "amazed" at Jesus' teaching. The Greek word could be literally translated, "knocked out of their senses." That's what happened to the people when they heard Jesus speak to them. They were knocked out of their senses because no one ever spoke like this before.

Picture yourself getting up on Saturday morning. You go to the synagogue in Capernaum and gather together with family and friends. You hear a new teacher speaking to you who has never spoken before. His words grip you. They shake up your life. You have never heard anything like it before.

When you come to worship or when you open your Bible to read, get ready to be amazed. Jesus' words have authority and power. Today we want to see this authority and power in the words and actions of Jesus as he teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum

Jesus shows authority by what he says

"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." The little town of Capernaum was special to Jesus. It was here that he performed his first miracle of changing water into wine. It was here where he healed Peter's mother-in-law. It became his base as we went preaching and teaching throughout the land of Galilee.

"Jesus went into the synagogue and he began to teach." Jesus loved to teach people about the kingdom of God. It says earlier in this chapter that Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe and believe the good news."

I cannot imagine what it must have been like to sit there and hear Jesus teach the good news of the kingdom of God. Oh how his eyes must have sparkled as he talked to people and told them how their God was sending his Son to this earth to rescue them and

make them part of a kingdom that would last forever. When Jesus told a man named Nicodemus about the kingdom of God he said to him, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up....God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." His words embrace you with his love for you.

The words of Jesus were so different from the teachings of the other rabbis. It says, "He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." Jesus taught differently. 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 rabbis determined that a Sabbath day's journey was about 3000 feet. You could walk 3000 without breaking the Sabbath. But then another group of rabbis said you could walk another 3000 feet if you established residency at the end of the 3000 feet. You could do this by having someone place something from your house 3000 feet away which allowed you to walk another 3000 feet. If this sounds convoluted, it is! Jesus these false teachers 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."

Allow me to illustrate this teaching with this stainless steel thermos. I picked this up at a garage sale for one dollar. The people were selling it so cheap because it was dirty and gross on the inside. I bought it, placed marbles and some TSP inside and shook the marbles vigorously. Within about a minute or two it was shiny and clean on the inside. I could do this with the thermos, but we cannot do this with our sinful hearts. The rabbis gave the impression that if you tried to look clean on the outside by keeping certain laws prescribed by the rabbis you could cover up the bad that was on the inside. Jesus taught with authority. He said this about the heart in Matthew 15, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean, but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

Jesus spoke with authority because he told them people the solution for the problem of sin was not looking into yourself or looking at what you do. Jesus told the people to look at him. He told them he was the Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. He told them he was the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Jesus told the people he was the Son of God who had come down to this earth to rescue them and save them. He taught them that the sacrifices in Jerusalem pointed to him as the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus still speak with authority to you and me through this amazing book we call the Holy Bible. The other day I was reading from the book of Proverbs for my personal devotions. I try to read the Bible every morning by reading four different sections simultaneous, underlining and making notes as I read. Sometimes the book of Proverbs gets to be tedious reading because of all the suggestions on how to live a better life. In my reading from chapter eleven I came across this verse: "Riches will not help anyone on the day of God's fury, but righteousness will save a person from death." These words spoke with

great authority and power. All the money in the world could not save me from one sin. My righteousness could not save me from one sin. My only hope of being saved from judgment day is the righteousness that Jesus has to offer.

Whenever we gather for worship, or whenever we read the Bible, we can anticipate that Jesus will come to us and speak to us with authority. Now let's see how Jesus backs up the authority of his words by speaking to evil spirits and throwing them out of a man.

Jesus shows authority by what he does

Did you know that devil loves to come to church with you every Sunday?

"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. The devil knows who Jesus is. He even calls him the Holy One of God. He knows Jesus has power and authority over him.

Notice now what Jesus does with this evil spirit. He speaks to the evil spirit or evil spirits and says, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" The words of Jesus are so powerful that the evil spirit comes out of him immediately and makes a loud shrieking noise. "Daddy, remember that day we were in the synagogue and Jesus threw out the evil spirit? Remember that terrible shrieking sound that we heard? It was awful."

As hideous as this shrieking sound was, it was a good sound for it shows us clearly this morning that Jesus has authority and power over Satan. He spoke to the evil spirit and the evil spirit left the man. The people were amazed. They said, "He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."

The devil loves to come to church. He cannot stand to have people listening to the words of Jesus and drawing close to him. That is why he will try to raise havoc in the church. In our second lesson, we heard from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He pleaded with these people to get along with each other and not be divided over petty issues. The devil likes to raise discord among Christians to keep them from hearing the words of Jesus.

Martin Luther said wherever the Lord build's his church, the devil builds a tavern next door. In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus said 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." Satan loves to come to church and sit with us. He loves to distract us with thoughts about what we have to do this week, or what someone is wearing, or perhaps even the upcoming Super Bowl. Even in our personal devotions, he will suggest that we do not take the time to ponder and meditate, because there are more important things to do.

Satan loves to accuse us of our sin and drive us to despair. He suggests to us that Jesus' words "It is finished" really don't apply to us. In the Revelation it says he accuses us before God's throne day and night. But then it goes on to say we overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of the Testimony. The words of Jesus have tremendous power and authority. Think of the power in that one little word "all" as it occurs in the verse, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."

The people were amazed at Jesus teaching. May wonder and amazement in Jesus' teaching always be with us until he calls us to be home with him in heaven. Amen.