

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Septuagesima Sunday, January 24, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 19, 413:5, 375, 433:413:6.

Lessons: Jonah 3:1-10, Acts 14:1-18, Luke 4:31-37.

Sermon Text: Mark 1:21-28

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As you heard two weeks ago, the Lord now had four men, Peter, Andrew, James and John who had been called to be his regular disciples, and to be trained for the great work of preaching the Gospel throughout the world.

John in his Gospel tells us that after performing his first miracle in Cana of Galilee, Jesus together with his mother and brothers moved to Capernaum. Its location on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and at the intersection of several important trade routes made Capernaum an ideal base for carrying the gospel into the regions of Galilee and beyond. Besides, Capernaum was also the home of James and John, and the home of Peter, whose mother-in-law was apparently living with him.

Today we find

JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM

- 1. His message impresses people in the same way that**
- 2. His casting out of an evil spirit also shows his power.**
- 3. What this means for us.**

On the Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue. Together with Peter, James, John and Andrew, Jesus attended the synagogue service. According to the custom of the Jews, he was given the right to address the assembly, to give them the explanation of Scriptures, what we might call a lesson or sermon, which was usually given by one of the elders of the synagogue.

Since synagogues had no resident “ordained ministers,” the rulers of the synagogue would invite some rabbi or teacher or scribe present to teach the lessons. So it happened that Jesus was at times invited to address the congregations.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus' specific message was on this particular Sabbath, but he does tell us about the impression his preaching made on the worshipers.

Jesus was obviously teaching something totally unlike the usual cut-and-dried droning on about tradition and observing the commandments of the rabbis. Here was a man with a message, with teaching, with doctrine so unusual, so impressive, that the assembled members of the congregation were filled with astonishment and wonder. His teaching obviously had an authoritative manner. He was a teacher who knew how to influence heart and mind. His applications were intelligible, and they went to the root of the matter presented by him. There was nothing of the dead monotony of the method of the scribes here. Luther says in explaining this text that he taught “with authority, that is, his preaching was as of one who means it with all seriousness; and what he said had power and lived.”

They were amazed, for Jesus did not teach as the teachers of the law did. They often just referred to the interpretations of past rabbis and were particularly good at breaking down God's word into any number of legalistic regulations. Jesus instead proclaimed the gospel of God. He did not quote any experts, but proclaimed the good news on his own authority. This was one of the first lessons the disciples had to learn, namely, that in

Jesus they were face to face with the final authority. For us, too, Christ is more than just a wise teacher or a model to pattern our lives on. He is the one who in word and deed reveals to us the undeserved love of God for sinners incorporated in his own person. His is the final word. Instead of preaching only Law, both God's law and man's laws, Jesus preached repentance with the message of forgiveness for sins. His teaching impressed the people.

We then hear about something else. He then does something which also makes an impression on them. Many people would say it was simply by chance, but it was by God's plan that there was present in the synagogue on that Sabbath morning a man with an unclean spirit, someone possessed by a demon.

It is not at all surprising that Satan, despite his defeat by Jesus in the wilderness after Jesus' baptism, was not ready to let such a message and such a preacher go unchallenged. It is the devil who caused a man in that synagogue to cry out against Jesus, for it is clear that this man was not speaking for himself. He could not of himself have known what he said about Christ. However, Satan and the evil spirit which possessed this man knew who Jesus of Nazareth was and what his purpose was. They knew he was the Son of God and that he had come to destroy Satan's hold over mankind. With his words Satan revealed himself wiser than many modern theologians and preachers. This knowledge did him no spiritual good; it only filled him with fear and trembling. He knew that he faced hell and the Gospel was not meant for him.

Though what the evil spirit said was the truth, Jesus would not accept his words as testimony. Satan was not a proper witness because those hearing him could say, 'Those are the words of the father of lies. How can we believe them?' Besides, Jesus was not as yet ready to proclaim openly that he was the Messiah. Many of his audience would have read political goals into that word "Messiah". On at least one occasion we read that ***"Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."*** (John 6:15 NIV). That's why told the evil spirit, ***"Be quiet!"***

Our Lord truly had compassion on the man possessed by the evil spirit – a most dreadful condition, as we see when the spirit left him. ***"Come out of him!"*** the Lord commanded, and the evil spirit could not resist. This brought home to the people, including the Lord's disciples, that Jesus spoke with authority. A simple command – no elaborate ritual or incantation – and the spirit had to obey. Jesus was and is Lord.

Many theologians deny the possibility of demon-possession then and now. It is true that we today do not identify many such cases. Perhaps the trouble is with us – we fail to recognize them. But we also know that Satan and his evil angels are sufficiently wise to adapt themselves to the times. Today we find their power displayed in the human attempts – usually by highly educated persons – to undermine Scripture and its teachings. False doctrine, cults, pagan religions, science that rejects Scripture – all these are the working of Satan. Since they attack us on all sides, we too need to turn to Christ and to the Scriptures for refuge. Jesus, the holy one of God, points us to the Scriptures and testifies that God's ***"Word is truth."*** (John 17:17 KJV)

Satan, the devil, is spiritually unclean, and contact with him or his angels makes one filthy before God. He had taken possession of the body of this man, using him to do his bidding. It was the evil spirit that cried out at the sight of Jesus, affirming that he and Jesus of Nazareth had nothing in common. This makes it clear that he and all the demons belonged to a group which are and always will be enemies of the Son of God. His cry is a cry of fear because Christ came to condemn them, to destroy them by chaining them forever in hell. He was conscious of his own spiritual uncleanness as compared with the holiness of Jesus, the Holy One of God.

But Jesus soon made his business known by rebuking the demon and bidding him hold his peace and come out of the man. Jesus has absolute authority over all things, over all creatures, not only in heaven and on earth, but also under the earth. He is the Master and Lord also of the evil spirits. And so this demon, forced against his evil will to obey Jesus, tried to vent his spite in one last effort to harm the body of his victim. He convulsed him, he threw him into a spasm, into what would appear to be a severe epileptic fit. Then, with a last great, screaming cry, he goes out of the man. The effect of this miracle, coming immediately after Jesus' teaching, which had made such a deep impression, was overwhelming. The people were astonished. Mark goes on: ***"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.'"***

These words show how deeply they were moved: ‘Who can explain this? Does this man have a new revelation that enables him to deliver men from the power of demons? Does he do this by his own authority, in his own power? For we see that he orders the unclean spirits around, and they obey him without question.’

“News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.” The news spread like wildfire, at once, everywhere, in the whole region around Galilee. Jesus’ miracle here gives indisputable evidence that he was indeed the Holy One of God, who had come into the world to destroy the works of the devil and to deliver all men from the bondage of Satan.

So what does this miracle of casting out this evil spirit mean for us?

We dare have no doubt about the power of Jesus Christ. His preaching has power. And where do we find his preaching? He does not personally preach to us in the same way that the man in this pulpit is preaching today. But he does always preach to us through his Word, the Bible, whenever and wherever it is read and heard. **“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.”** (Hebrews 4:12 NIV)

And the evangelist John assures us that Jesus is the Word: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14 NIV) It is that Word of God, that Word of Jesus that gives us hope and assurance of eternal life and comfort while we are still here on earth.

And his power over the evil spirit, who was a follower and servant of the devil, assures us that Jesus has all power also over Satan and all his evil powers, just as he assures us in Matthew 28: **“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”** (Matthew 28:18 KJV)

News was made that day at Capernaum with Jesus’ preaching and this miracle. It is not surprising to read at the close of this episode: **“News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”** In next Sunday’s sermon you shall hear some of the results of this news spreading. This too helped to prepare the way for Jesus and his message. Crowds would soon gather wherever he went. This gave Jesus many opportunities to preach the truth of God’s Word. Scripture also records that he also occasionally shows his divine power through his miracles. But the preaching of the Gospel was his chief work on earth, next to his suffering and death for the sins of all mankind.

His public ministry on earth lasted only about three years, before his betrayal, suffering under Pontius Pilate, his crucifixion and death came about. In special services during the Lenten season we review the suffering of Jesus Christ. May we meditate on what Jesus Christ did for us today and each day. Amen.