

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Septuagesima Sunday – 70 Days Before Easter, February 13, 2022

✠ ✠ ✠

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

Hymns: 19, 65:1, 557, 375, 8.

Lessons: Jonah 2:1-10, Acts 8:2-8, Mark 1:14-20.

Sermon Text: Mark 1: 21-28.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Many people have little respect for others in authority, whether it be authority in civil matters, authority in the workplace, authority in schools, and even authority in the home. This is always the result of sin. There is, first of all, a sinful flesh in every one of us that never wants to be told to do anything or even be told that we are really full of sin. Then there is sin in others, which we may want to use as an excuse to disobey or ignore authority.

We are living in a time when good, God-fearing authority figures are scarce. Laws are one way to demand or try to show authority. But our Lord Jesus Christ shows his authority in another way. He proclaims God's word, especially the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. He also shows his authority over evil: over sin, death, and the power of the devil. In our text Jesus shows his authority over evil spirits and he impresses people with his message of authority. Today let us see that

JESUS PREACHES WITH AUTHORITY AND PROVES HIS POWER WITH A MIRACLE

1. Jesus preaches *“as one who had authority”*.
2. *“He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”*

When our text says Jesus taught *“as one who had authority”*, this is the same word and same power and authority that Matthew quotes of Jesus when Jesus says *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* Matthew 28:18.

Matthew summarizes Jesus' teachings and work early in his ministry in these verses: *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.”* Matthew 4:23-25.

On the Sabbath day following their selection to become followers of Jesus – Jesus called them to be “fishers of men” – Peter, James, John, Andrew and Jesus attended the synagogue service in Capernaum. Because synagogues had no resident ministers, the rulers, the leaders, of the synagogue would often invite some rabbi or teacher or scribe to teach the lessons. On this day Jesus was invited to address the congregation. He was no doubt recognized as one who knew the Word of God.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus' specific message was on this particular Sabbath day. But the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching, because he did not teach as the teachers of the law did. They usually quoted interpretations of past rabbis and were particularly good at breaking down God's word into any number of legalistic regulations. The teaching of the scribes was mostly just repeating words and man-made rules. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of God. He quoted no human 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 or a pattern for our lives. He is the one who in word and deed reveals to us the undeserved love of God for sinners. His is the final Word.

In our churches we claim to preach with authority, the authority of the Word of God. Our called pastor writes: ‘I struggle to make every word in every sermon, Bible class, catechism class and every time I speak about God’s Word to you totally in agreement with the Bible, the very Word of God, and you are to search the scriptures to verify that what I tell you is the truth of God’s Word. To borrow a phrase from courtroom movies, I strive to teach and proclaim to you the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. But we try not to do it arrogantly, but rather with humility.’

When Jesus was teaching, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit, a spirit of the devil, 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!”*** He says “us”, referring to himself, the devil and all his angels. This evil spirit knew who Jesus was. But Jesus didn’t want to be praised by the father of lies. Later in his ministry, Jesus spoke to unbelieving Jews and said this: ***“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*** John 8:44.

We should not be surprised that Satan, despite his defeat by Jesus in the wilderness temptations, was not ready to let any message of Jesus, the Son of God, go unchallenged. It is the devil who caused a man in that synagogue to shout out against Jesus. The man himself could not have known what the evil spirit within him said about Christ. However, Satan and the evil spirit which lived in and 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 reveals himself wiser than many modern theologians. Many teachers in many churches do not confess Jesus as the Savior of mankind who came to destroy Satan’s power. This knowledge did the evil spirit in the man no spiritual good. It only filled him with fear and trembling. The evil spirit knew that he was going to receive eternal damnation in hell and that the Gospel was not meant for him.

This is the first recorded instance of Jesus encountering a demoniac, a demon-possessed person. This man himself was not excluded from the public worship of God. But the evil spirit within him knew Jesus was the one whose mission it was to destroy the works of the devil. The evil spirit cried ***“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!”*** In the Son of God, the evil spirit recognizes the One who had come to destroy him. For this reason Satan tries his hardest to escape from Jesus. Jesus clearly demonstrates his supremacy and won the victory in every conflict with the devil, and the writers of the Gospels and Mark in particular, have emphasized Jesus’ victories over the demons, because it was part of his mission of the redemption of all mankind to destroy the powers of darkness and evil.

We read that this evil spirit, this demon, calls Jesus ***“The Holy One of God”***. That is a term reserved in Scripture only for Jesus. He is holy in himself. And he has been consecrated, set apart, anointed by the Father for the greatest task in the service of God’s kingdom. But Jesus will not listen to this testimony of his adversary, the devil. Jesus does not want to be proclaimed by evil spirits. . So Jesus commands the unclean spirits to be silent and to depart. ***“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”*** The devil makes a furious effort. He tears at the sick man, and shouts with a loud voice. Then he throws him down and comes out of him. ***“The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.”***

This miracle teaches us three things: 1. The personal existence of the devil: He is real; 2. That the devil has great power, but the power of God is stronger; and 3. That the devil never willingly but only when forced to do so releases his victim.

“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.’” If the people had been astonished at his doctrine, because he proclaimed the Word of God with power, they were now even more amazed when they saw the power of his deeds. Jesus’ mission was not to save the devil and evil spirits. They are destined for hell. Jesus came to save mankind. No human is excluded or is to be excluded from the preaching of the Gospel. God plainly ***“wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*** 1 Timothy 2:4 (NIV)

But the Devil and all his evil spirits – the evil angels – believe there is a God and tremble. We read in James: ***“You [the child of God] believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.”*** James 2:19 (NIV)

Although what the evil spirit said was the truth when he said “***I know who you are--the Holy One of God!***” Jesus would not accept his word of testimony. Satan was not a proper witness, because those hearing him could then 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. Most of his audience at this time in his ministry might then have thought that he had some political goal. Even after he fed 5000 with five small barley loaves and two small fish, John tells us: “***After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.***” John 6:14-15 (NIV)

So Jesus commanded the evil spirit to be quiet! The evil spirit came out of the man with a shriek, but he did not speak anymore. Jesus truly had compassion on the man possessed by the evil spirit - a most dreadful condition. Come out of him! the Lord commanded, and the evil spirit obeyed. This made it clear to the people including the Lord’s disciples that Jesus spoke with authority. A simple command – no elaborate incantation – and the spirit had to obey. Jesus was and is Lord.

Many theologians deny the possibility of demon possession now and even those recorded in the Bible. 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 even in the human attempts – often by highly educated persons or persons in a position of authority – to undermine Scripture and its teachings. False doctrine, pagan religions, cults, obvious unionism, 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.

What happened that day at Capernaum was real news, good news. It is not surprising to read at the close of this miracle: “***News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee***”. This too helped to prepare the way for him and his message. Crowds would soon gather wherever he went. Mark never misses an opportunity of recording the profound impression which Christ’s miracles made on those who witnessed them. May Jesus’ power and authority be with us whenever we speak the truth of God’s Word! Amen.