

**Mark 1:21-28 + As One With Authority + Series: We Are His Witnesses**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY**  
**4th Sunday after the Epiphany + 28 January 2018**

He wasn't like the others. When he taught the Word of God, he didn't quote Rabbi So-and-So or Rabbi Such-and-Such. He didn't refer to the Mishnah or the Talmud or any of the traditions of the elders. He didn't even say, "Thus says the Lord..." like the prophets of old, the ones whom Yahweh—the Lord of free and faithful grace—had sent to represent him conveying his messages to the people. He simply spoke, preached, and taught the Word of God. It was astonishing, even overwhelming for everyone sitting in that synagogue along the shores of the Sea of Galilee! It was like nothing they had ever heard. **"He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes."** It wasn't that the rabbis had failed to teach God's Word at all. It was just that Jesus of Nazareth taught the things of God as God. He preached the Word of God as the Word of God, and it blew his hearers away. Jesus taught **"as one who had authority."**

Now what does that mean? What does it mean that Jesus **"was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes"**? When we think of authority, we might think of government officials or police officers. We might think of people who are experts in their field or their profession. They are the "go to" people for settling a question or debate. We might think of people who are in a position over us and have responsibility over us by their calling or their position in an organization. Such an authority often has the final say much like the sign that President Harry Truman used to have on his desk, "The buck stops here." Yet is that the kind of authority Jesus had as he spoke and preached and taught?

Perhaps it would be clearer if we looked at the comparison that Jesus' hearers made. They compared Jesus' teaching **"as one who had authority"** to that of the scribes, the teachers of the Law of Moses. They were responsible for teaching the Word of God to his people, but there was a problem. The rabbis and teachers of the Law spent most of their time talking about the Word of God rather than teaching the Word. They spent their time citing this rabbinic writing or teaching that tradition of the elders. They spent so much time quibbling over human precepts and opinions that they lost sight of what God wanted to teach his people.

...But then Jesus came along and did none of that. He didn't lean on the opinions and precepts of others. He didn't preach and teach from the traditions of the elders. Instead he spoke the Word of God as the Word of God. The Apostle John, who personally witnessed Jesus' teaching, described Jesus in a way that sheds light on his authority. **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** (1:1,3-5,14)

Jesus is the Word and that Word is God. Jesus was that Word that gave life to all creation. Jesus is the Authority of authorities, the ultimate authority who settles our questions of eternity and purpose and salvation and life. Therefore whenever Jesus spoke, taught, or preached, he did not speak about the Word of God or convey a message from God like the prophets of old. No, the words that came from his lips were the Word of God with all of its life-changing, course-altering, faith-creating power.

That's why Jesus' hearers in Capernaum that Sabbath morning were so astonished, so amazed, so overwhelmed at what they heard. Jesus' teaching went so much deeper than anything they had ever heard even from the most faithful rabbis and scribes. They were listening to The Prophet, the One who was to come from Israel and be like Moses, but who would far surpass Moses. You see, as the writer of Hebrews told us, Moses was a faithful servant in God's household, but Jesus is the Son over the entire household of God. Jesus brought good news to their sin-sick souls. He brought healing to their broken hearts and relief to their guilt.

This teaching from one **"with authority"** blew them away...and Satan couldn't stand it. Satan didn't want any of it. He didn't want to hear that life-changing, course-altering, faith-creating Word. He didn't want to witness its life-giving power within the dead human hearts he so desperately tried to control. So he tried to discredit Jesus. He tried to throw a roadblock in the way of this Authority of authorities, this Prophet of prophets, this Word of God. **"Just then a man with an unclean spirit was in their synagogue. He cried 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 demon's attack on Jesus used an unexpected tactic. He confessed the truth. He acknowledged Jesus as **"the Holy One of God."** That's true. Satan and his unclean demons know who Jesus is. They know that Jesus is God and is even God over them as he is over all creation. On occasion they will even grudgingly acknowledge

that fact, but what was this demon trying to do? What was Satan trying to accomplish? Well, whatever the devil's plan, Jesus didn't let it happen. **"Jesus rebuked him saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw him into convulsions, shouted with a loud voice, and came out of him."** Satan lost the showdown like he loses to Jesus every time.

Jesus shut Satan down **"as one with authority,"** as God himself. Jesus demonstrated his divine authority by silencing and casting out the demon who could do nothing more than convulse and shriek one last time. The demon did what Jesus told it to do because Jesus is God and his Word always does what he says. No demon of darkness can overcome that powerful Word.

Yet how did the people react, all those folks in synagogue that day? **"They were all amazed, and so they began to ask each other: 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once the news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee."** Naturally, the people were astounded, amazed at what they had just witnessed. I'm sure we would be too if we had witnessed a similar miracle right here in our midst!

Yet what's striking about this account isn't so much the amazing miracle and astounding demonstration of divine power that Jesus had just accomplished. No, it's the people's reaction. When they had first heard Jesus' teaching, they were astonished, even overwhelmed because what he taught and how he taught was like nothing they had ever witnessed. Jesus spoke the Word of God as the Word of God, but after driving the demon out of that man, you would think that they would be like us—forgetting what's really important because something big, powerful, and exciting has just happened. Yet for once the people actually reacted properly.

Yes, that miracle amazed them. It astounded them, but it only added to their profound amazement at what Jesus had been teaching them. You can hear it in their conversations. **"What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits...and they obey him."** As they discussed and debated and reflected on what they had just witnessed in that synagogue, they recognized that Jesus had brought them **"a new teaching with authority"**—unlike anything they had ever heard with an authority they had never seen. They recognized that his commands to those unclean spirits and their subsequent obedience only proved that his authority as God was like no other.

It's a fascinating account, but why is it still important for us living here in 2018 Central New York? Why is it important that we know that Jesus teaches **"as one with authority,"** and that even the demons obey his command?

Well, let's start with the obvious. We aren't Jesus. You aren't, and I am not. None of us has that kind of authority, not even pastors who are trained in the Word of God. I simply convey what God says in his Word, but do not speak as the Word of God. And yet the last couple weeks we've been considering mission work—the invitations we give to loved ones to come and see Jesus, the fact that we represent Christ.

Now with all this talk about mission work and sharing the Word of God and sharing the good news of your Savior, do you ever find yourself thinking like the ancient prophet Isaiah who confessed to God, **"I am a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips"**? (6:5) Perhaps even as you heard this account, did the thought cross your mind, "I'm not one with authority"?

Yes, that's true. We have sin's guilt on our hands, on our hearts, and on our consciences. We've kept our mouth shut when the Lord gave us opportunities to share his Word or speak of our Savior. We've failed to be ready to give the reason for the hope that we have or to speak the truth in love with gentleness and respect. We've made choices or done things or said things that have turned people away from us as Christ's witnesses rather than attract them to him. We've proven time and again that we aren't Jesus.

Only Jesus can be Jesus. Only Jesus can be our Savior from that guilt on our hands and hearts and minds. Only Jesus can cover our failures and foolishness with his holy accomplishments and wisdom, with his holy blood and innocent death. Only Jesus can come to us through his Word—and by that power come through water and bread and wine—and be Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, our God. As he did for those amazed and astounded people in that Galilean synagogue so long ago, Jesus comes to us with authority like no other through his life-changing, course-altering, faith-creating Word. He creates life amidst our death. He turns us around toward heaven when we were headed for hell. He overcomes the demons in our lives to set us free.

Then he entrusts that life-changing, course-altering, faith-creating Word to us so he can be Savior and Lord and God for the people around us in our lives. His Word has overwhelming power, power which even demons must

obey, and he entrusts that Word to us! Then, grace upon grace, Jesus gives that Word authority and power to change hearts and minds and lives even in this age when so many reject the Bible and faith and the supernatural.

If you doubt what I say, look at what he's accomplished in your life through his life-changing, course-altering, faith-creating Word! If Jesus can accomplish that in your life and in the lives of countless others throughout the ages, what can he accomplish when you open your mouth and share his Word with others, his good news packed with all of his divine power and authority? That's the Word we have. That's the Word we speak, and that Word will always accomplish what our Savior-God desires. Amen.