

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Epiphany 4B  
January 28, 2024  
Mark 1:21-28

Immediately! Authority! Astonished!

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. 22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. . . . 27 And [having cast out the unclean spirit] they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." (Mark 1:21-22, 27 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

In today's Gospel, there are three words which particularly stand out. The first is "immediately." In St. Mark's Gospel, this word is used often, and gives his account a sense of urgency and action that moves the story along right from the start. At the baptism of Jesus we read, "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." At the temptation of Jesus: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness." When Jesus calls the fishermen Simon and Andrew to be his disciples, we're told, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." Likewise with James and John: "And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him."

You can't help but notice that word "immediately" or, sometimes, "at once." In fact, Mark uses the word more than any other New Testament author, and it's used three times in our text alone: "And immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching." "And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit." "And at once his fame spread everywhere."

Following His Baptism and temptation, Jesus is launched into His messianic ministry right away. And with that, conflict. Immediately, at once, we see Jesus being confronted with forces opposed to Him and His coming. And this sets the tone for the gospel as a whole. Tension, conflict, will mark Jesus' ministry. Whether it is from unclean spirits or from human opponents, Jesus will meet with resistance all the way to the cross. But Jesus is determined to carry out His ministry and fulfill His mission, no matter how fierce the opposition. And all the "immediately's" in Mark's gospel emphasize Christ's determination to accomplish His purpose.

And that purpose, dear friends, is to save you, to rescue you from the clutches of the devil and death and the grave. Jesus will not let anything stop Him.

Next, the second word that stands out is “authority!” The words and the works of Jesus carry this divine authority. His teaching and His deeds. First, Jesus was in the synagogue, teaching the true meaning of God’s Word. Jesus speaks as though He knows what He’s talking about! And of course, He does! He is the Word of God incarnate. If anyone knows how to expound and interpret the Holy Scriptures, it is Jesus. He literally wrote the book!

So, our text says, “He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” How did their scribes teach them? It would sound something like this: “Rabbi such-and-such said: I have received a tradition from Rabbi so-and-so, who heard it from his teacher, and his teacher from his teacher,” and so on. They just kept repeating the opinions of other rabbis. But that was not how Jesus taught. Jesus would say, “You have heard that it was said so-and-so; but I say unto you . . .” Then Jesus would get straight to the point and make clear the intent of God on this or that subject. And people could tell that Jesus’ words carried such weight.

More than that, His works did too. Both His teaching and His deeds demonstrate His divine authority. We see this in the incident with the man with the unclean spirit. “And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.” Here is a man in the control of, in the clutches of, an unclean spirit, a demonic spirit. “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” Well, actually, yes! Jesus of Nazareth has come to destroy the devil and all His works and all His ways. And this will just be the start. The unclean spirit has got this right. And he’s also got this part right: “I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” Yes, that’s true, too. Jesus is indeed the Holy One of God. He is God’s anointed, the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is the very Son of God come in the flesh, and He has come to rescue mankind from the dominion of the devil.

And that’s what Jesus is going to do right now. He doesn’t waste time dialoging with a demon. “Be silent, and come out of him!” Out you go! Which, of course, the unclean spirit has to do. Jesus is in charge here, and He’s exercising His authority like a boss.

This also shows that Jesus has come to deliver you from the clutches of the devil. You and I were in Satan’s domain. We fell for the devil’s lies just like our parents did in the garden. And so we were headed for hell. “But God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). How? By Jesus taking on our sins and suffering our punishment. In so doing, even as He suffered and died on the cross, Jesus was stomping on the devil’s head and dealing the death blow to Satan’s power. This is real authority that overcame sin and death, as evidenced by Christ’s victorious resurrection.

And Jesus uses His authority on your behalf. What He says, goes. When He says you are forgiven, you really are. His words carry authority. “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). And so it is! “This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” And so it is! You can believe what Jesus says and does. You can stake your life on it. He has that kind of authority.

Now, the people who heard His teaching and witnessed His works recognized that Jesus had this authority: “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority.” “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” They were astonished! They were amazed! Some twenty times in the Gospel of Mark there is a word like that to describe the reactions that people had to Jesus.

And how about us? Have we lost our ability to be astonished by Jesus? Has the gospel become humdrum to us? Has the good news become old news? If it has, ponder anew, take in afresh, the wonder of God’s love for you in Christ. Consider what Jesus did for you, by making the all-sufficient sacrifice for your sin, delivering you from death and the devil and eternal damnation. Regard Christ’s glorious resurrection and the prospect of what that will mean for you, namely, your own bodily resurrection when Christ returns. Imagine the eternal life you will enjoy, perfectly whole in body and soul, in a restored creation, in perfect fellowship with your Lord and all the saints. And even now, you have the gift of the Spirit, to keep you in the one true faith, through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament. God is lavish in His gifts! Repent and receive those gifts, today and always. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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