

Sermon for February 1, 2015 - 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Mark 1:21-28 (NKJV)

Theme: The Powerful Preaching of Christ. . .

- 1) *Amazes all who listen (21-22)*
- 2) *Frees the soul enslaved by Satan (23-26)*
- 3) *Is the message we discuss and share (27-28)*

²¹ Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. ²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. ²⁷ Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." ²⁸ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee. (Mar 1:21-28 NKJ)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, why are you here? Are you here simply because it's the thing to do on Sunday morning? Are you here to be entertained? Are you here because Mommy or Daddy made you come? Are you here to see me?

No, I know why you are all here this morning. It's for the same reason I am. We have gathered together in God's house to hear **the Powerful Preaching of Christ**, that 1) *amazes all who listen*, 2) *frees the soul enslaved by Satan*, and 3) *is the message we Christians discuss and share*. May the LORD bless us as we, with the evangelist Mark as our guide, meditate on these truths.

Part One: Amazes all who listen

Our sermon text takes place early in Jesus' ministry when he was in the process of being established as a unique preacher who, unlike other rabbis, proclaimed a liberating Gospel. It's probably for this reason that he was invited to give a sermon at the local synagogue (a Jewish church) in Peter's hometown of Capernaum.

We read: ²¹ Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. ²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Yes, Jesus' powerful preaching held his audience in rapt attention. It was utterly amazing! He was not like the regular scribes, whose sermons have often been characterized as dry, legalistic discussions about the ceremonial law that left their listeners feeling more guilty than before the service began.

Jesus' teaching was completely different. He did not quote this, that or the other rabbi – pointing to human learnedness or authority. No, He directly quoted and explained the Bible - showing an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures that only He could have, because He (being true God) was the author of them all. This certainly left his audience spellbound, but even more amazing than how he preached is what He said.

And what was that? Jesus preached: *“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* (Mark 1:15, NIV84). Oh, how wonderfully different this message was from that of the rabbis! “It’s all up to you and your works.” was their message, “Hide your sins from God’s sight - covering them up with sacrifices and strict obedience to the traditions handed down to us from the elders.” And so, instead of offering peace and comfort to the people entrusted to their care, the scribes only added to their burden and guilt!

This is what made Jesus' preaching so amazing. In contrast to the scribes, he preached: “Don’t hide your sins from God, confess them all – sorry that you have sinned against Him. Admit your inability to keep his law and ask him to forgive you. And the LORD will forgive you. Why? Because He has sent His Messiah to win your salvation. The time has come. Your salvation is at hand. Repent and believe the good news!”

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the Gospel, the good news of God’s forgiving love for us in Christ, is a message that still amazes the world. You see, every other world religion teaches that it’s up to you to save yourself through good works. Even atheism says it’s up to you to make your life meaningful and leave a lasting legacy. And if you “make a mistake” . . . if you sin? Well, there are no “do overs”. And so, many people go through life burdened by their sins, doing their best to hide them from God – hoping that they are good enough to earn heaven.

How different is the Gospel: the news that God doesn’t want us to hide our sins from him, but confess them so that He might forgive us. How refreshing is the news that *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16, NKJV) Did you know that there is no passage like this in any other religion in the world? It is a powerful message that many have not heard, but when they do hear it, they will (like the audience in Capernaum) find it utterly amazing.

Part Two: Frees the soul enslaved by Satan

The devil and all his demons, however, do not want people to hear or believe this message. They don’t want all their “hard work” of enslaving souls ruined by the good news of God’s forgiveness in Christ. And this is why they do all they can to distract us from Christ’s powerful preaching any way they can, as is seen in what happened next in our text:

²³ *Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!”*

Oh the poor soul that spent his days enslaved by the devil. The fact that he was at the synagogue shows that he was not, according to worldly standards, some wildly, wicked person. No, he was a member of the congregation, someone who probably worked hard at trying to earn his salvation. Sadly, the harder he worked, the more enslaved he became. Who could save him from his body of death? Jesus could and would.

The demon that possessed this man raged in fear because it both knew Jesus and why He came: *that He might destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8, NKJV). And so, as a captured rabid dog might snarl, snap and whine, this demon does the same. It tries to discredit Jesus by testifying to the truth. I mean, would you want a demon as a character witness? Jesus most certainly didn’t.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" Jesus did not need or want this devil's testimony. His Word and works were testimony enough for people to believe and be saved. And so Jesus simply commands the demon to come out. ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't see too many cases of demon possession in our corner of the earth, but that doesn't mean they don't exist. I have spoken to enough pastors and missionaries – and have even had a run in with a case myself – to know that demon possession is very real. But that's really beside the point, because Satan knows that there are other ways he can enslave souls to his will. For example he likes inflating the pride people have in themselves and their own reason, so as to prevent them from recognizing their sins and repenting. Others he entices with the glitz and glitters of pleasure and worldly pursuits to keep them from coming to Christ. He uses a plethora of lies and false teachings - convincing people they are working for God - when they are really just serving his purposes. Yes, even though we don't see a lot of actual "demon possession" in our corner of the globe, this doesn't mean that the devil hasn't already enslaved our friends, neighbors and family members who either haven't heard or don't believe the Gospel.

And this is where the awesome comfort of Christ's powerful preaching comes in: just as a simple word from Christ freed that demon possessed man in the synagogue, so also the simple Gospel of Christ you proclaim has the power to free those who are still caught in Satan's clutches.

When we share Christ's amazing preaching with others, it will stir up conflict and hate in some. Just as the demon yelled at Christ and did not easily slacken his grasp from the man, so also the devil will move people to try to rage against us. As we witness the Gospel, people, who are still under Satan's influence, will say unloving things. They will do their best to discredit both us and our message.

But Christ's Gospel is more powerful than all of Satan's raging. It accomplishes everything God desires exactly when He wants it to happen. The great Gospel of Christ liberates the soul from Satan's tyranny. How? By creating faith in the hearts of those God has chosen. It pronounces every believer free from all sin, at peace with God, and under His protective care. The Gospel is God's powerful Word. The LORD promises to send His Spirit as we proclaim it so that the voice people hear is not ours, but that of Jesus – the Holy One of God, who has come to destroy the devil's work so that *whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*"

Part Three: Is the message we discuss and share

What was the result of Jesus powerful preaching in Capernaum? We read that those who were in the synagogue *were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."* ²⁸ *And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.*

Christ's powerful preaching was certainly something to talk about – and not just in a "gossiping" kind of way. No, Jesus gave his listeners some real food for thought. Never before had they heard someone speak of repentance, forgiveness and peace as this Jesus did. Never before had they heard of someone casting out a demon with a mere command. Their worldview had been rocked! Could what Jesus said be actually true? More importantly, could He possibly be the Messiah, prophesied about in Scripture? And so they talked.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, every time we gather for worship or Bible class, we come to discuss Christ's powerful preaching – but in a way different than the Jews did at Capernaum. They were trying to

figure out who Jesus was. We, by God's grace, already know who He is: the Messiah who came to suffer, die and rise again in order to forgive our sins. He is the almighty Son of God who rules over all things and whom no demon or devil can over throw.

When we gather together to hear Christ's powerful preaching, our purpose is to encourage one another with it – reminding each other of the forgiveness love and salvation we have in Christ Jesus. We want to grow in our faith because we know that we still live in a world that is hostile to Christ and his followers. We also want to plan and work together, so that we might share Christ's powerful preaching in the world around us, so that others might also hear the amazing news of Christ's forgiveness, repent and be freed from Satan's slavery.

Fellow members of Immanuel, you came here today to hear Christ preach and see his power over Satan. Through the eyes and pen of the evangelist Mark, you got to experience these very things. What comfort can you take home now for yourself, as we finish this sermon? This: Your God loves you deeply – so much so that He sent his one and only Son to be your Savior.

Don't crowd Jesus out of your life, listen to him. Rejoice in His good news and understand its power to liberate you from whatever trials or temptation the devil uses to harass you. And don't keep what you learn to yourself, share it with others. Don't be ashamed of the Gospel, because it is a message that amazes all who listen to it. It is God's power for salvation for all who believe it. Amen.