

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, 1/28/2024 based on Mark 1:21-28

“There is no such thing as an interruption for Jesus.”

What is this? A new teaching - with authority! This is the question people asked when Jesus taught in the synagogue.

I think this is an important concept for us to remember too. Where does your authority come from as a Christian? How can you test all who want to claim authority over you... especially with all the political rhetoric in the news and on social media. These election years are hard on communities and families.

Our authority can be found in the Word of God. And for Lutherans, whenever we say the Word of God, we mean Jesus... the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. He summed up the Bible in the dual commandments to Love God and Love our Neighbor as ourselves. I was reminded of Psalm 146:3 this week as I struggled with the constant barrage, “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.” Our hope is in the Lord.

In our Gospel for today from Mark 1, Jesus just got baptized. He overcame temptation by Satan. He then called some ordinary fisherman to follow him and help him with his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God come near. Jesus started his public mission in a small town called Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' first public act was to enter a Jewish Synagogue on the Sabbath day and teach. The synagogue was a popular place in the first century for Jews as places for the study of scripture and debate. They often allowed guest speakers or rabbis to join them.

Notice how Jesus went to where the people already were gathered. This is an important distinction for us church people. Most of our faith lives are lived outside the church building. Did you know that 99.4% of our lives as Christians are spent outside of the worship space or Sunday School or confirmation. We live out our faith in our homes, at school, in our places of work, in the communities we live? Church is everywhere we go.

Jesus' teaching astounded people. It was a new teaching... with authority. Not like the scribes.

While Jesus was teaching, the whole assembly was interrupted by a man with an unclean spirit. The spirits themselves cried out to Jesus, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." The spirits knew Jesus by name and Title. Here we witness a bigger cosmic battle going on between good and evil.

Jesus may have astounded the humans with his teaching, but the demons shudder at Jesus' presence. Jesus' true identity may be veiled among the people in the synagogue and the disciples, but the demons absolutely know Jesus by name and title.

Do you see the hierarchy here? Jesus has ultimate power over the unclean spirits as evidenced by their reaction and Jesus rebuking them with a powerful word. They came out of the man, convulsing him, and crying with a loud voice.

Connected to us, notice how Jesus directly addresses the unclean spirits directly and not the man. Jesus sees how these spirits are crippling this man's ability to live fully in community. He sees the absolute value and worth of this man... not letting the unclean spirits define him. This is a sign of love and grace to me.

What is God up to here? First, we learn that God in Human Flesh is directly interested in people and their well-being. Jesus' love for all humanity shines forth in this story. He freed the man who suffered from demons.

But don't we all have demons of some sort. Our demons can take the form of temptations, fear, obsession, or addiction. Some of our demons are a result of our past that manifest themselves in anger or violence. Many suffer from mental illness or depression and anxiety. We all struggle with something. Regardless, Jesus cares about you and wants abundant life for you.

The second thing we learn is that Jesus is at our side when we suffer. Jesus stopped everything to help this man, who I am guessing others cast aside. How often do we dismiss people that might inconvenience

us or upset our well laid plans? To Jesus there is no such thing as an interruption.

And finally, we learn that Jesus offers the gift of grace to all... inside or outside the church. This demon possessed man simply just showed up at church. Jesus saw him as a beautiful child of God and liberated him. We receive this same love and acceptance in God's word and sacraments. Holy communion is also known as the meal of freedom.

As Lutherans, this is key to us. We are saved by grace through faith on account of Christ alone. Our salvation is not based on any works we do, or how well we win at life, or how well trained we are in the scriptures. It is our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ that liberates us. When we are baptized, Luther says in the small catechism that God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised.

Who is your ultimate authority? Look to Jesus in the four Gospels and learn his teachings and the way he treated people. You can't help but to be changed. Amen