

Epiphany 4-January 28, 2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Mark 1:21-28

"No Compromise" Sermon by Pastor Randall J Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

It must have been difficult to be a scribe in the synagogue the day that Jesus came to Capernaum when Jesus, without being invited and the scribes not knowing what to expect, stepped into the pulpit to speak. Everyone else noticed the difference in what Jesus said, so I would guess that the scribes also noticed the attention that everyone was paying to the new pastor in town.

Mark records that they were astonished at this teaching. I don't think THEY had heard a sermon before, and THEY were astonished from what the way the scribes would teach for a long time, and nothing would happen or change and the way that Jesus said just a few words and it was done immediately. Jesus didn't teach with more authority than the scribes. Jesus taught with authority and the scribes did not.

Teaching takes longer than preaching does. Teaching is talking about something, and it can take a long time. Preaching is delivering it in as few words as possible. The crowd that gathered around Jesus were amazed at something about him even though at first, they likely couldn't put their finger on what was different. But the difference became vividly evident when a man who was possessed with multiple demons suddenly appeared in the synagogue while Jesus was in the middle of his teaching.

The only authority the scribes would have exercised would have been to have the man removed from the synagogue. The man was unclean and if this man didn't leave the synagogue, the scribes greatest fear was that some of this man's uncleanness would rub off on them or others. The scribes would not have noticed that the voice that was speaking was not that of the man. The demons that possessed this man's conscience were speaking and they were not afraid of the scribes. The scribes would have removed the man from the building, but the demons would have remained in the man. No amount of teaching could change the hold the demons had on this man.

The demons that spoke through this man's mouth used all the crafty tactics that Satan had taught them to use. The demon's called Jesus by name. They knew this was not just anyone named Jesus, but this was THE Jesus who was from Nazareth. Nathanael wondered if anything good could come from Nazareth, but the demons knew that Jesus from Nazareth had the authority to destroy them. They further identified Jesus as the Holy One of God. Peter denied knowing who Jesus was three times, but Jesus didn't do to Peter what he did to this man who appeared in the synagogue. Last week, we heard the story of how Jonah, who didn't listen to what the Lord told him to do, was given another chance after ignoring his command to deliver a word of repentance to the city of Nineveh. There are many examples of how patient Jesus is with his sheep who wander away. This is the lesson we learn from the prodigal son who is welcomed by his father with open arms after turning his back on his father. Jesus is patient and slow to anger when caring for his flock. But when it

came to the demons who knew who Jesus was, Jesus had no patience, nor did he take any time to compromise with the demons that had taken up residence in the mind of this man.

Whenever Jesus encounters a demon, the first thing he does is get their complete attention. Jesus does not allow anyone else to share the pulpit when he has something to say. So, the first thing that Jesus did was silence the demon, so that the only voice that could be heard was his. And to do this, Jesus simply said, "Be silent!" and his authority was clear.

This past Wednesday morning, I took my turn in helping our daughter and son-in-law make sure their kids got on the bus and had all they needed for the day. The bus picks them up later on the route, so that their parents are gone before the bus comes so that they get to their jobs on time. I was instructed of their routine, so I was mostly prepared for what could happen. But what I witnessed that morning, I am still processing and trying to figure out what the cartoon that was being watched before the bus came has that I don't have. When I came into the house, I wondered if they were up yet. The house was completely silent. Then when I came into the living room, no one was making a sound. It was as if someone had found their mute buttons and silenced their voices. Not only that, but they were so mesmerized by what seemed to me to be a strange cartoon that not one of them even noticed when I entered the room and sat on another chair as we waited for the bus to arrive. Since there was Confirmation that evening, I was hoping to learn how I could have the kind of authority that would silence every other voice and so that they could be astounded with my teaching. I'm still trying to master this.

There are so many other voices in this world for all of us to listen to rather than Jesus. Some of these voices even say things that we think Jesus would like to hear like my family comes first before anything else. Some people say that they know who Jesus is and that he has the power to destroy but fail to take time to listen to him. However, Jesus knows the difference between talking about him and having Jesus delivered to you.

Jesus muted the waves that tossed the ship around that Jonah was on so that the other sailors could hear what Lord had to say to them. Jesus muted the waves that battered the boat that his disciples feared would kill them. Jesus began by muting the demons who were telling Jesus who he was. Jesus knew who he was, so he didn't need a demon to tell him where he came from and what he came to do. Jesus didn't just talk about what he came to do. He did it. Jesus muted the demons so that there would be no comprising of words or ideas of what would happen next. Then when all was silent, Jesus commanded the demons to come out. Jesus did not separate the man from the synagogue, Jesus separated the demons from the man so that the new man could stay in the synagogue and hear more from Jesus.

"Be silent and come out of him." The demons had been muted by Jesus and in the silence, they were destroyed.

You have arrived in this worship space today to silence the many voices that would attempt to draw you away from hearing Jesus today. But Jesus has prevailed again and in as few words as possible has set you free from sin. Be still and you will know what Jesus has done for you. Amen.