

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany B 28 January 2024  
Mark 1:21-28  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.* Let's pray: ...

Hands up if you've ever thought, "I wish I felt less safe?" I know some of you are thrill seekers, but you still value safety and security. Even those who participate in extreme sports will still check their equipment to make sure it's functional and reliable before they jump, swim, dive, fly, ride, parachute, or drive on Main North Road.

So, if we value physical safety and security, doesn't it make sense that we'd want the same in spiritual matters also? So, we need something reliable, trustworthy, and dependable to protect, shelter, and guide us through all trials and tribulations. But rather than *something*, our spiritual safety and security is found in *someone* . . . Jesus.

Jesus is the one who teaches, speaks, and comforts with authority. And his authority is our security, because only his powerful word and presence is able to guard us and keep us safe.

In Jesus' day, no one spoke with the conviction that the prophets of old had. Most of the teachers were obsessed with keeping the rules of the elders and the traditions of the people alive and well, whether they agreed with God's commands or not. They didn't really preach God's word. They preached about his word, but were more interested in maintaining their traditions than driving the message God wanted his people to hear.

Jesus changed all that. Sinful humans could no longer twist God's word to meet human desires. In Jesus, we hear God himself proclaiming his Word to his people. His testimony is clear and to the point: "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes [teachers of the law]."

So clear and truthful was Jesus, that even the demons were rattled, "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!" It seems odd at first, that the unclean spirit addresses Jesus by one of his correct titles. But Jesus doesn't need confirmation from demons. He commands the demon to stop. With just a few simple words he rebukes the demon saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" The demon listens and obeys. That, saints, is authority and power that God alone has.

It's the same power Jesus exercised over evil for us on the cross. An antagonistic observer might suggest that Jesus lost his power and authority when he was crucified, but we know the truth. On the cross, Jesus told Satan to "be quiet!" Satan means "accuser," and his only mission is to accuse us before God for all the sins we've committed. And he's right! All we can do is stand in God's courtroom and nod in agreement, because we've all done more than enough wrong to be condemned.

# HOWEVER,

a caveat has been written into God's legislation. Jesus' death is the great silencer. He suffered the punishment that we deserved and died. Moreover, he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven. So now, as the Judge seated at God's right hand, Jesus listens to Satan's accusations and declares that the sentence for our sins has already been served. Like a loan paid off by a wealthy benefactor, our debt has been erased, wiped; zilch, zip, zero owed! So, Satan can go jump! We're free to serve God, free to rejoice in him now and forever in the unending joy of heaven! **Satan is defeated and we are saved!**

Notice, though, that the people's amazement was only partially related to the silencing and casting out of the demon: "'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'"

Aren't we a fickle lot? Constantly craving the shiny and new. These people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it was new. I wonder how many of those people, fascinated by Jesus' new teaching would still be his disciple after his death and resurrection? How many would have grown tired of hearing and seeing the same things from Jesus, and gone off to search for another newer, more exciting line of spiritual thinking?

What about you? Have you felt your interest in Jesus, waning? Has Sunday morning become a struggle when you know the message will largely be the same, you know the hymns will be familiar, and the people even more familiar? Does it seem pointless to spend time studying the Bible? Do you feel that God's word has become old hat and you feel like you know it all already? If so, then you need just the opposite of what it feels like you need.

We need it more! We need to be continually praying that the Lord sends his Holy Spirit and open our eyes to see again how great and unsearchable the love God has for us truly is. The love of God forgives all of our sins and opens heaven to us. His Word keeps us in that faith. The more we delve into God's Word, the more we realise how much we don't know and just how little we understand. And that drives us back to him again, to search out the answers, to understand the depths of his grace, to rejoice in all that he does for us.

So today, may Jesus' authority cast out our sluggishness and silence the voice that cries out against his Word as being boring. Our eternal safety and security lie in his death and resurrection alone, FOR US! What truly matters is God's forgiveness and saving love for us. Here we find the security that knows we belong to God as he belongs to us. In that security, rejoice in his power that saved you; rejoice in his Word that keeps you, and rejoice that your Saviour has rescued you from all harm and has made you safe with him forever! Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe and secure in Christ Jesus. Amen.