

January 28, 2024
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 1:21–28 (Deuteronomy 18:15–20)

THE HOLY ONE OF GOD HAS ALL AUTHORITY.

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

Aside from Jesus, Moses is one of the most recognizable names in Holy Scripture. The Lord God called to Moses out of a burning bush to be His prophet, His spokesperson and mediator, to lead His people out of bondage in Egypt. God communicated His Word to Moses, then Moses delivered that very Word to the hearers saying:

“Thus saith the LORD...” (Exodus 4:22)

Scripture records that Moses was faithful as God’s servant, speaking the things that God had given him to speak. (cf: Hebrews 3:5–6) Between the time of Moses and the advent of Christ Jesus, God called a long succession of prophets to deliver His Word. But Moses was unique. He was not only the model for all future prophets, but he was also a “*type*,” a “*prefiguring*” of Jesus Himself, the One whose coming Moses foretold of saying:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” “... [God] *will put* [His] *words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that* [God] *command[s] him.*” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18)

Jesus is the Word who was *in the beginning with God*. (cf: John 1:2) In perfect submission to the Father’s will, and for us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man. (cf: Nicene Creed) The Word became flesh and still dwells among us today. (cf: John 1:14)

At His Baptism Jesus was anointed as the Messiah. As He came up out of the water the heavens were torn open and the God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, preparing Him to embark on His mission of salvation. (cf: Acts 10:38) And at the same time, God the Father’s voice from heaven pronounced His approval on His beloved Son and His saving mission saying:

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11)

God the Father reiterates His baptismal proclamation from heaven at Jesus’ transfiguration when He says:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5)

Listen to Jesus. Listen to His Words. His Words have authority. It’s the authority of the Father who sent the Son. Jesus speaks the very words that God gives Him to speak. (cf: John 17:8) Moses was given authority over Israel, but Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on

earth. He is the greater Moses who not only speaks the words of life, He gives His life as ransom so that all who trust in Him might live eternally.

In our Gospel text this morning Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. St Mark records that those listening:

“... were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22)

At this time in history the prophets had been silent for 400 years. For 400 years, no one had been authorized by God to be His spokesperson. When the rabbis and scribes would teach, they would only repeat and expound on what others had said or written, quoting secondary sources, human opinions and the man-made traditions they had added onto God’s law. But Jesus is sent by the Father with a new teaching with authority. (cf: Mark 1.27) To hear Him speak isn’t to simply hear one man’s interpretation or opinion. He never quotes another rabbi, another authority, or another source. Yes, sometimes He quotes God’s Word as recorded in what we call the Old Testament. But He never uses the Old Testament prophetic formula:

“Thus saith the LORD...” (Exodus 4:22)

... because when Jesus speaks people are hearing the very voice of God.

Jesus preaches a new teaching with authority. At His Baptism He proclaimed:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

God is no longer hidden, speaking through prophets. God **is among** them. The reign and rule of God **is present** in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus. Everyone in the synagogue marvels as they hang on His every word. Everyone, except for one.

There was a man in the synagogue who was afflicted with an unclean spirit, a demon or multiple demons. In Bible days, there seems to be a dramatic increase in demonic activity when Jesus comes on the scene. And that should be no surprise. The devil is a fallen angel who hates God and hates God’s people. He is the evil prince of the world and ruler of a host of stooges who do his evil bidding. (cf: Matthew 25:41; Ephesians 2:2) He seeks to alienate all men from God and is therefore especially a dangerous enemy of Christians. And when Jesus begins His earthly ministry, two realms collide: the spiritual realm of the Lord God of Israel, and the spiritual realm of the devil who is aligned against God.

The demon immediately recognizes Jesus. He knows Jesus’ Name. He knows He is Holy One of God, God’s own Son. And he also knows that He has come destroy Satan’s dominion over the world and sinful humanity. Jesus rebukes the demon, commanding him to be silent and come out of the man. And the demon has no choice. God’s Word is efficacious. His Word does exactly what it says. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) By His Word, Jesus defeats the demon, demonstrating His omnipotent power in the devil’s own domain. The people are amazed for they have witnessed the reign and rule of God among them in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus.

In the fullness of time, in perfect submission to the Father’s will, and for us and for our salvation, Christ left the glory of heaven and took on the form of a servant. Not as an example for you to emulate, but in order to accomplish something that you could not, dying a criminal’s death on the cross in your place for the forgiveness of your sins. (cf: Philippians 2:6–8) His death on the cross

may have momentarily appeared to be the devil's triumph, but in fact it was his overthrow and defeat. Three days later the Father raised His Son from the grave for your justification. (cf: Romans 4:25) Christ has defeated sin, death, and the devil so that all who believe in Him might be delivered from the condemning wrath of God and have everlasting life.

And that brings us to you and me. While Jesus has defeated sin, death, and the devil on Calvary's cross, it doesn't mean you will live a life free of conflict. As uncomfortable as it sounds, the devil is still alive and well in the world today. He's as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (cf: 1 Peter 5:8) In this world, you *will* have pain and suffering. You *will* have trials and tribulations. Indeed, the devil has been defeated, but he has not yet conceded his defeat. He has been overthrown, but in our Lord God's hidden wisdom, He has chosen to allow the devil to intimidate, torment, and afflict His people.

God has the devil on a leash. He has him restrained, but that doesn't mean he still can no longer trouble you and make your life miserable. And the greatest trouble he can work is unbelief, doubt, despair. Jesus says that the devil is a murderer and a liar. (cf: John 8:44) And this murderous liar comes to you day and night with is ugly accusations, saying: *"I know who you are, and you can't possibly be a Christian. I know who the Holy One of God is and you're definitely not holy. God could never love you."* He'll use anything to attack your conscience and create doubt: your reason, your thoughts, sickness, pain, and adversity. He accuses you of your sin, reminding you of what a miserable failure you are at keeping God's Law.

And... many of the devil's accusations are true. Yes, you and I are sinners. The mirror of God's Law reflects that reality clearly. But that doesn't mean you're not holy. You were clothed in the righteousness of Christ in Baptism. You live as saint and sinner at the same time. And that's a paradox that the devil hates. He wants you to choose one or the other. He says: *"Which one is it? Are you a saint or a sinner? Are you a child of God or the offspring of Adam? It has to be one or the other. You can't have it both ways."* Yes, the devil is alive and well. St Paul writes:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12)

Paul's doesn't write this to frighten you, but to provide fair warning of where the real danger lies and to encourage you to treat your fellow human beings as victims in need of rescue. (cf: Winger, Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, 705) It's a battle for your soul, your life, and your faith. So take heart dear Christian. In Christ, you're a new creation. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:17) It's no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. (cf: Galatians 2:20) In Baptism He has bestowed upon you faith, the Holy Spirit and all the gifts that He won for you on the cross. The One who bled and died for you has the Word to silence and cast out the devil and his stooges. Commenting on the schemes and machinations of the devil to trouble the heart of the believer, Martin Luther once wrote:

"... a man who loves the Gospel and longs to believe and to live properly... must learn to resist the devil, who frightens and saddens him, and to say: "You lie, you wicked devil, even though you appear in the guise of Christ my Lord and employ His words. I am baptized in His name, and I believe the Gospel. ... [your]

menacing and terrifying statements do not pertain to me. I must not and will not listen to them now. I will cling to the words [of] Christ... (LW 24, 15)

St. Peter says to resist the devil. How? Not by resting on your own reason and understanding. No. You resist by standing firm in the faith. (cf: (1 Peter 5:9) Stand firm on the faith that is built on Christ the Cornerstone, on the solid rock of His death and resurrection, on the forgiveness of sins by His blood, on the certainty of salvation in Baptism, on the assurance of forgiveness in His Body and Blood.

St. James writes:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you...” (James 4:7–8)

Listen to Jesus. Listen to His Words. His Words have authority. It’s the authority of the Father who sent the Son. Jesus speaks the very words that God gives Him to speak. Just as God called and authorized prophets to be His spokespersons, today He calls and authorizes pastors to proclaim His Word and the very Word of Christ. It means that when the called servants of Christ, your pastors, deal with you by Christ’s divine command, it is as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ Himself were speaking to you, forgiving your sins and proclaiming your salvation for the sake of Christ crucified for you.

So the next time you are troubled by the devil, by the world, by your own conscience and you begin to doubt your own holiness in Christ, stand firm on the faith that is built on Christ the Cornerstone. Cling to the Word of Christ. Say to the devil: *“Be silent in the Name of Jesus. I am baptized in His name, and I believe the Gospel.”*

Christ Jesus is the Holy One of God. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him by the Father. The time is fulfilled, and the reign and rule of God among us in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus. He has defeated sin, death, and the devil. He comes to you in Word and Sacrament to forgive your sins and to strengthen and sustain you in the true faith unto life everlasting.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.