

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching” (Mark 1:21).

On the Sabbath following their selection to become fishers of men, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, together with Jesus, went into Capernaum to attend the synagogue service. And since, synagogues had no resident ordained minister, the rulers of the synagogue typically would invite some rabbi or scribe present to teach the Scripture lessons. On this day, these rulers picked Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, what Jesus taught on this Sabbath day, Mark does not tell us, but Mark does tell us the impression His preaching made on those worshippers. They were astonished. In the Greek, a stronger term is used; it is about the equivalent of “dumbfounded.” You see, these worshippers had never heard teaching like this. This is what caused them to say that Jesus ***“taught them as one who had authority”*** (Mark 1:22a).

So, what was so different about Jesus? Well, typically, the preacher would appeal to the interpretations of the past rabbis. Jesus, however, quoted no experts, but proclaimed the good news on His own authority. What Jesus taught was not something that He had learned from someone else. Rather, everything He taught and preached He knew by direct knowledge. So, everything Jesus said was in perfect accord with God the Father.

As everyone was flabbergasted at hearing God’s divine truth, suddenly there was an interruption. A man among the congregation cried out, ***“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”*** (Mark 1:23-24). What we have here is a case of demonic possession.

As we live in the western world in the year of our Lord 2024, many today do not believe in demon possession. And if they did believe in it, many think demon possession was just something that happened years ago. So many today believe that surely Satan no longer sends evil spirits into people, but demon possession is real. You may not notice it, but that’s likely since you refuse to see it.

But Satan would rather attack in more subtle ways. Lying and seduction are powerful and have longer lasting effects than coercion. As the Father of Lies, Satan does a much better job with us when he simply convinces us that lies are truth. We see this in the attitudes of all sorts of social problems today. How easily the devil converts us into being liars ourselves – even lying to ourselves and fleeing God’s Word of truth.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul proclaims this truth for all time: ***“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 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”*** (Ephesians 6:12).

But we, who are in Christ, should not be frightened. Remember, the battle has been won, even if the war is not completely over.

But oddly enough, the great confession of today’s reading from Mark is not from a disciple, but from the demon-possessed man when he says, ***“I know who you are – the Holy One of God”*** (Mark 1:24). Now, this man could not have known what he said about Jesus. It was Satan that possessed this man who knew who Jesus of Nazareth was and what His purpose was. Satan knew, since he was in fact – *at one time* – a messenger of God, an angel of God. Even as a fallen angel, Satan will never forget his enemy. So, at that moment in the synagogue, two realms are colliding: the spiritual realm of the Lord God of Israel, and the spiritual realm aligned against it.

Even with his words, Satan is revealing himself to be wiser than many modern theologians. However, this knowledge is doing Satan no spiritual good. This knowledge is only filling him with fear and trembling that his reign as the prince of this fallen world is nearing its end.

Even though the demon-possessed man was speaking the truth about Jesus, Jesus would not accept its words as testimony. Satan was not a proper witness, for those hearing him could say, *“Those are the words of the Father of Lies. How can we believe them?”* Rather, Jesus wanted the people to recognize and accept Him as the Messiah through His authoritative preaching and seeing His works. So, Jesus rebuked him, saying, ***“Be silent, and come out of him!”*** (Mark 1:25). With that simple command, at once, the demon obeyed. Now that man shook violently, and Satan used the voice of that man to utter a horrid scream, but that scream was that demon’s last whimper. At last, the man was free. Jesus had given a mighty demonstration of His almighty power in Satan’s own domain.

All throughout Scripture, demons know who Jesus is. Again, like their leader Satan, they, too, know who Jesus is, due to being fallen angels. Jesus would confront many demons throughout His earthly ministry. In Mark 5, Jesus met a demon-possessed man, with tremendous strength who had the power to break shackles and chains. The possessed man cried out to Jesus, ***“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me”*** (Mark 5:7).

And even when Christ accomplished His mission as He lived a sinless life in the place of all sinners, even to the point of death on the cross, so that His innocent death atoned for the sins of all people by stripping Satan of all his power to control the souls of mankind, Satan still attempts to go after mankind even though he has no shot of victory. As Paul and Silas were in prison, they met a slave girl who was possessed by a demon. She cried out, ***“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation”*** (Acts 16:17). So, even though Satan and His minions hate God, it is their angelic nature to proclaim God and His truth – even if they don’t want to.

Again, God does not want demons proclaiming His truth, since again, those are the words of the Father of Lies. How can anyone believe them? And that’s the point. It would be Jesus’ authoritative preaching and His mighty works that would bring people to faith in Him as the Son of God.

Jesus is the One with authority, not Satan and not Satan’s minions. When Jesus spoke, He was speaking from the very essence as God. By His authority, He told the demons to depart. He alone had that kind of authority because He is the Author of life. He is our Creator. And our Creator is good.

To every demon-possessed person Jesus met, He brought them liberation and new life.

Today, even though he has lost the battle, Satan continues to attack us on all sides. He whispers in our ears saying, *“Did God really say?”* He causes us to question truth as he leads us into lies. We must repent and turn to Jesus as Satan’s deceit will never end until Christ returns in glory on that Last Day. And as that great and magnificent Day nears, Satan grows ever more desperate.

Satan, the great deceiver, led our first parents Adam and Eve into disobedience, sin, and death. As a result, we are under God's wrath sentenced to eternal damnation as we merit and deserve – through Adam's sin and your personal sins of thoughts, words, and deeds against God and your neighbor. Without God's love in Christ for you, there was no help, no hope, no comfort for us. This all changed only when the Son of God in His goodness had mercy came down from heaven by becoming man – *like us in every way, except without sin* – to help us. Christ snatched us from the jaws of eternal death in hell. He won us. He made us free. He restored us to the Father's favor and grace as His own possession through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. He has taken us under His own protection and His shelter in order that He may rule us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.

So, what should we do to combat Satan, this fallen world, and our own sinful nature that much prefers Satan's lies to God's truth? Well, turn to Christ, who alone has all power and authority in heaven and on earth. Turn to Christ, who alone has the authority that defeats Satan and his demons. Turn to Christ, who suffered and died for you, so that your sins would be forgiven and that you would be free from Satan's accusations. Turn to Christ and listen to His voice in the Scriptures. Turn to Christ and receive His grace of forgiveness through the words of absolution and in His very body and blood under the bread and wine that forgives your sins and strengthens your faith.

In the spiritual battle until the Last Day, for everyone who clings to Christ, your victory has been won and all by grace through faith in Him, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +