

“Teaching and Healing with Authority”

Date: January 31, 2021

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Mark 1:21-28

Occasion: 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Themes: Jesus, Healing, Teaching, Authority, Son of God

There are a lot of people today who believe Jesus was a good man who said a few nice things, and basically wanted people to get along. For many people, that’s about all they know concerning Jesus. But it’s not enough. Jesus is so much more than simply a good story.

He is so much more than just another prophet or teacher. He is more than a great moral philosopher. As Christians, we believe He is the Son of God. That knowledge doesn’t come naturally to us; it is a revelation from God. It is another epiphany, to use that word.

Two thousand years after Jesus walked on earth, we don’t have the luxury of forming our own opinion about him, face to face. We have to rely on witnesses who were there with him. This is where the witness of the biblical record is so important. We receive first-hand witnesses through the words of the Bible.

Mark records that when Jesus came to Capernaum, on the Sabbath day, he entered the synagogue and taught. The crowd of people was astounded! Why? – One word: authority. Jesus taught, **not** as the Scribes had taught, but as one having authority.

I wonder what they saw and heard in the life of Jesus that made him stand above all the other teachers of his time. Why were they so drawn to him? Why did others later look back and say, “Truly, this was the Son of God.”? That’s what we want to explore this morning.

First, his teachings were new. They were new because Jesus moved from past tense to present tense. Unlike the teachers of his time who said

“Moses taught us...” or “The Exodus teaches us...” or “The prophet Isaiah says...” or “Rabbi So-and-so says....” Instead, when Jesus stood up in the synagogue to speak he said, “I say to you.”

When the other rabbis told people to take a sacrifice to the Temple for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus said directly to the people, “Your sins are forgiven.” The teachers of his time all encouraged people to believe in God, and along comes Jesus who tells them, “Believe in God, believe also in me.”

All of the other rabbis got their authority from quoting Scripture and talking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They referenced other rabbis who came before them to support their positions. But Jesus! He was something else. He was the authority. The difference was astonishing.

He said things like this: “I am the door.” “I am the vine” “I am the gate.” “I am the Good Shepherd.” “I am the light of the world.” His teachings reverberated with something new and astonishing. God was no longer living in the past. God was present, in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

That same message is true today: Jesus is present with us. Because of Easter and the resurrection, because of Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with us still. He continues His presence, through the Spirit, still bringing his power and authority. He continues to be the way, the truth and the life.

E. Stanley Jones, the great missionary of the 20th century, tells the story of a missionary in the jungle. He got lost, with nothing around him but trees and vines and bush and a few cleared spaces. He eventually found a small village and asked one of the natives if he could lead him out of the jungle. The native said he would.

“All right,” said the missionary, “show me the way.” They walked for

hours through the dense jungle, without a map or any clear way. The missionary began to worry and asked his native guide, “Are you sure this is the way? Where is the path?”

His guide answered him, “Bwana, in this place, there is no path. *I am* the path.”

My friends, our path out of the jungle of this world is God in Christ. We may have rabbis and teachers, pastors and reverends, churches and synagogues. But we are all like the missionary; we must follow the Guide who is the path. His name is Jesus; He is the authority of life.

As it was then, so it remains today, that when people recognize the truth in the words of Jesus – not the words of preachers or the doctrines of the church – but the words of Jesus – His truth will set them free.

Jesus is not merely a good man who said nice things. But when the Spirit reveals it to people, they will recognize God’s voice speaking through Him, and they realize He is the path home to God. The authority of his loving words will speak to their hearts. Jesus is the way.

There is more to this story, though. Jesus taught with authority but he also acted with authority. Jesus backed up his teachings with the power to heal. He showed that he had authority even over the demons. We are told a man, who was possessed by a demon, entered the synagogue.

You don’t have to conjure up images of the exorcist in your mind to understand this story. People today are controlled by many types of demons – a demon of hate, of revenge; a demon of unbridled lust for power; uncontrolled greed, fear, guilt, jealousy; demons of addiction. Yes, there are still demons among us today, seeking to destroy people’s lives.

The spirit within the man asks, “What do you want of us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Have you come to destroy us? I know you are the holy one of

God.” Now, Jesus had not even spoken to the demon, but the demon acknowledges of his own accord, that One with greater authority had arrived.

“Be quiet!” Jesus speaks sternly to the demon. “Come out of him!” The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people who were observing this were astonished.

The authority of God was evident in front of their eyes. Like watching Moses part the Red Sea, or watching the walls of Jericho fall, the power of God was evident when Jesus cast out the demon. “What is this?” they asked, “A new teaching and with authority. He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”

The teaching and the healing of Jesus are done with authority. And people recognized God at work through Jesus. In time they would come to know Him as the Son of God.

Jesus came not just to teach people to be nice to each other, but to deliver us, to heal us, to save us from the demons which would destroy us. Jesus came to make us whole – in body, mind and spirit. He came with a new teaching, a teaching which had the authority of Heaven.

Jesus Christ can make all things new. He can heal us of our sin, our fears, our guilt, our anxiety, and our shame. By his authority, Jesus can transform us and make us new.

I invite you, once again, to ask Jesus into your heart, and allow him to cast out the sin, the demons and anything else which robs you of the fullness of life, which God wants each of us to have. Allow Jesus into your heart to rule, to rule with authority, the authority of God’s love. Amen? Amen!