

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of February 1, 2009*

## The Supreme Authority is Our Saviour (Mark 1:21-28)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark:

“They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, Today I want to talk to you about the power of words. We use words everyday. We say things with hardly a thought all the time.

Sometimes, we forget to say things we should have said. Other times we realize it would have been better not to say anything at all. This is because, words are essentially powerful. They have the power to change lives, to inspire us and give strength.

We see this in many memorable speeches delivered through the ages. Sir Winston Churchill, for example, in the face of attacks from Nazi Germany rallied the British people with these powerful words, “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

Or who can forget the words of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1963 when he delivered his famous “I have a dream” speech. He said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.” His words and speech was a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement and his speech left its mark on American history forever.

We also see the effect of words in the case of the newly inaugurated president Barack Obama. When on the day of his inauguration we saw two miles of people listening in silence, hanging off his every word. To many his words had immense meaning. People were inspired by their power as they had been by many of his previous speeches. Words helped make that event a significant moment in American history.

Indeed, words do not simply go off into the air when we speak. They can carry great weight and have importance. However, with this weight they can do great harm. What you say impacts those around you. Any disparaging word has impact. The saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones but names can never hurt me” is simply not true. When we speak with bitter words they do harm to the soul. As James chapter 3 says, “The tongue (also) is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts

the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

However, words can also do great good. We see this not only in the move toward racial equality in the United States or in the Prime Minister of England fortifying his people in the face of war; more importantly and most dramatically, we see this in our spiritual lives.

In our text we see the ultimate power in Jesus’ words. We see it in the people’s reaction. It says, “They were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, not as the scribes”. In other words, they were knocked out with amazement. They were knocked out because Jesus spoke directly from God. His words were not based on human traditions; He had no need to quote other rabbis. Rather, He spoke as the One who had first hand knowledge. He spoke as the One who had come from heaven. He spoke as the very Word of God who had come in the flesh

What He said to the people penetrated their soul. We see this in the case of two men who spoke with Jesus after His resurrection while they were on the road to Emmaus: “They asked each other, ‘were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” This is how it is when Jesus speaks. There is no place to be lukewarm. His Word demands attention. It divides soul and spirit, bone and marrow. For He is the very Word of God who created the world. The Father spoke through His Son and it was so. He is the supreme and ultimate authority in the world and in the universe.

But Jesus does not leave us with words only though they are powerful and life changing. He backed up His message and confirmed it with powerful deeds. He showed His Almighty power and authority in the synagogue.

There was a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit; he was possessed by a demon. And when the demon spoke he spoke with fear and trembling and with disgust for Jesus of Nazareth. He said to Christ, “Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God.” Now keep in mind that demons are immensely powerful. There are accounts in the Bible where people who have been possessed by them are overcome completely, sometimes convulsing and ranting out of control. And yet this demon who spoke from the man had such fright and terror when faced with Jesus Christ.

Friends, the Bible says that God is love and sometimes His love takes the form of a warrior. In Christ, God fights for your salvation. His holiness terrifies those who oppose Him. No, our Lord is no softy. Christ is the ultimate special-forces soldier sent on a mission to beat down the dark forces of evil. The Lord is the Commander in Chief of heaven and earth and when He speaks the spirits must obey His order.

Friends, the demonic world is real. Demon possession happens today as it did in New Testament times. We may or may not see as many cases of it but it does happen. The

power to perform these exorcisms lies in the name of Jesus. The light of His Name scatters the darkness and sets people free.

Friends, it is unlikely that any of us here today is possessed. But I guarantee you that we are all tempted by unclean spirits. They hamper and hinder us and urge us to follow our sinful desires. Satan is happy if we keep our Bible on the shelf or use God's name without thinking, in vain in saying things like "Oh my ...". The precious name of God, the name of Jesus is to be used with utmost reverence. We call upon it to pray, to praise and give thanks, never recklessly.

The power to overcome the sin of this world is in the name of Christ. Satan has no power over the Holy One of God, the Word of God in the flesh. While it's true you don't need an exorcism; however, you do need a cleaning. We all do. We need Christ to come and clean house in our soul. We come to Him in repentance and faith. This is the reason He has come, to be our Saviour, to destroy the work of Satan, to drive Him out, and wash you clean in His blood shed for you, to give you a new life in the waters of Baptism. Christ is present always to drive out the unclean thoughts of our hearts, and sanctify us from unholy words.

The question is; are you willing to be cleaned? Do you want to change? Let us be sure of that. Let us answer that in the affirmative for our Lord lives to absolve and mould us each day by the power and grace of His Word and Spirit.

Friends, when you hear the word "authority" what comes to mind? Maybe a stern looking teacher or an angry judge? Most often people view authority as somehow a hindrance to their freedom, as something that imposes oppressive rules. While there are abuses of authority in this world the very opposite is true with Christ. His authority is a very good thing for you. Jesus says in John 10, "I lay down (my life) of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again". This means that in is love He freely chose to give His life on the cross. And this means that His authority has become your salvation. Nothing controls Christ. He has overcome death and sin, and Satan forever by His own accord so we might be His own. What a comfort! "If God is for us who can be against us?" as Romans says.

By His authority Christ preserves His church, He forgives our sins and leads us to seek Him more and more and follow Him along this exciting path of freedom and eternal life. His authority sets us free from the burden of legalistic rules. Rather, He leads us to respond in love to the love that He first showed us by removing our sins and making us His children and giving everything we need each day for all eternity. As John wrote in his first letter, "We love because He first loved us".

Yes, indeed, there is power in words and there is great awesome power in the Word made flesh. By His powerful act of love we are free to call Him our Redeemer, our Friend and Brother, so that as a popular prayer says, "that we may know Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly, day by day." Amen. Go in the peace of your Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.