

CHRIST OUR PROPHET

21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. 23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

25 “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” 26 The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he was teaching, teaching, and always teaching. He taught while he was walking from one place to another. He taught while he was eating. He taught on hillsides, and on the road, and in the temple. But a great majority of Jesus’ teaching took place as Mark shows us, in the synagogues of the Jews. A synagogue could have been its own building in a village, or a living room in someone’s house, or a clearing in a woods by a stream. This one in Capernaum was probably in the middle of town not far from the dock or the wharf, since Capernaum was on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and this was Jesus’ regular pulpit when he was in town.

Synagogue meetings were midway between our Christian liturgy and our Sunday morning Bible classes. The gathering was at a prescribed time. There was a regular series of lessons that were followed, which we can easily identify today. There were hymns and songs that were sung. There were prayers that were said, according to the season of the year. And there was a lecture that came closer to our Bible study lectures than our sermons. People could and did ask questions. What set Jesus apart was that he taught with authority. He wasn’t a preacher like the ones they were used to, which were the scribes and the other Rabbis. So what set Jesus apart? Well, of course we know that Jesus is divine—he is the Son of God. But also, in all of his teaching, Jesus accepts the Word of God, the Bible, as authoritative, as well. He doesn’t question it; he does the opposite. He takes it more seriously than anyone else ever has. And we have the very same tools and point of view that Jesus has. We know that Jesus is divine, the Son of God, and we accept the Bible as the Word of God, and the authority we follow.

Well, while Jesus was preaching on this day, somebody in the group spoke up. This wasn’t unusual—people asked questions in the synagogue. But this question wasn’t like anything they had heard before. A demon had entered in to one of the people of Capernaum, and the demon asks the question: **What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?**

Demon possession seems commonplace in the Bible in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels and in the early mission work of the Church in the Book of Acts. Demon possession also seems commonplace when our missionaries go to a new place in the world. Sometimes people wonder about this. Is it a sign of something? Well, yes it is. If you add up these occurrences, you figure out that the devil shows up this way, with his demons possessing people, whenever the Gospel is first preached in a place. Later on, he uses other means to trip people up. But when the Gospel first comes, it is as if the Devil sends out the demons his emissaries and spies to test the preaching in that place. If the preaching there is nonsense, if it's false teaching, then they have no more work to do. Why bother? But if the preaching and teaching points to Christ, then the devil has to get to work.

So when the Word of God is preached, the Devil comes—he has no choice. That means that pastors and teachers of the Gospel will have targets on our backs. We will be attacked. But we also have God's holy angels to protect us.

Here in Capernaum, the demon didn't just find another rabbi mumbling over the same old same old; he didn't even find a learned rabbi pointing ahead to the coming Christ. To his horror, he found Christ in person! And he cries out with this question, which could be translated as a sentence instead of a question: **You come to destroy us!** It's true no matter how you take it. The demon knew him; recognized him. Not because of the color of his eyes or the sound of his voice, but because of his teaching. It was perfectly clear to the demon that this was the Son of God—the Holy One of God, in fact—God himself, in person, in the flesh. And as far as the demons in hell are concerned, there is only punishment. This demon can't figure out what to say. He asks if Jesus has come to destroy him, but that already happened, before Genesis 3 gets going, the Devil and the other fallen angels which here in Mark are called Demons have already been thrown out of heaven by the hand of God and condemned to eternity in hell.

But now is not the time for the demon to have the floor. It's Jesus' time to preach—the demons already had their chance but fell into sin. So it's not the Demon's turn to speak, and so Jesus tells him to **“be silent!”** and also to **“come out of him!”**

And the demon had to obey. Jesus spoke with the authority as God. Now, there are a few different things we could focus on at this point, such as the increase of demonic activity in North and South America today, which is probably the result of the loss of the Gospel to more and more generations and whole regions, so that the return of the Gospel is once again attracting the attention of the Devil in some places. But we want to remember the words of Moses from our Old Testament lesson, Deuteronomy 18. Moses promised that the Messiah would come, and he called him **“a prophet like me.”** Now, Moses was talking about the series of prophets that followed after him, beginning with Joshua, but he was also pointing ahead to Jesus Christ, the ultimate fulfillment.

Remember that a prophet is someone chosen by God to speak the word of God. And the office of Prophet is also part of Christ's three-fold office as the Savior: he is Prophet, Priest, and King. As we contemplate Jesus as the Prophet, we see him in this way very clearly in a passage like this one before us, where he is speaking with his divine authority. But Jesus also keeps proclaiming his message today, through the institution and preservation of the Gospel Ministry. The ministry means proclaiming the Gospel of Redemption to mankind, offering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper – both of which we're seeing this weekend, and instructing the young and the uninstructed in the truths of the Bible.

And this is where the Devil attacks us today. We have the most precious thing of all, the Holy Word of God, and the Devil sows seeds of doubt, and something that comes close to boredom. "Oh, the Bible. I've read that. I've heard it. I get it. I've got that covered. I've kept the Third Commandment."

But the Third Commandment, remembering the Sabbath Day, is about the attitude of my heart for the Word of God. Every work that we do needs to be guided by the Word of God, and when it is – when I wash the car or wash the dishes or figure out the new tax law because I am a forgiven child of God, then I sanctify that day, and that work, whatever it is. It is holy to the Lord.

When Jesus cast out the demon from that poor guy in Capernaum, he commanded it to get out. But in his grace and in his mercy, Jesus the Holy One of God who has every right to say the same thing to us, says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

All the while that we live here on earth, in the Dominion of the Devil, that rascal wants to tear away your confidence in Jesus with doubt or boredom or whatever his temptation of the day might be, He wants you to be in torment alongside him as he suffers in agony forever in hell.

But Jesus drives him away. Jesus plants faith in your heart and he nurtures it, because he wants you at peace with him forever in heaven. And in your baptism, all of your sins were washed clean. In the Lord's Supper, you consume his sacrificed flesh and blood in communion with him. In the absolution at the beginning of our service today, your sins were forgiven once again – and you are a forgiven child of God.

Listen to Christ our Prophet, to everything he says to us, to guide our way and to calm our fear and to teach us that **we should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.**

Amen.