

Written Copy: Mark 1:23-27 “Christ is Always in Control”

4th Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 28th, 2024

Text: Mark 1:23-27

²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ “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.” ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “**Be silent, and come out of him!**” ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

The text’s intent

To show how Jesus brings His reign and rule to bear invading the territory of Satan and the demons who asserts control over the fallen sinful world. He enters the synagogue in Capernaum and exudes the authority of the Creator/Sustaining God by teaching from the Scriptures He authored with a power and authority like no one else. Then He demonstrates that His Word not only has the power to teach and inform, but has the power remove the presence and authority a demon has over a man, muzzle that demon, and cast it out, all by two commands uttered by Jesus’ mouth. Those present in the synagogue are amazed at His teaching, and flabbergasted at the authority His Word exudes over the demon. And the report of what He has done spreads throughout that region of Galilee.

Focus Statement:

While God is still ruling over all Creation and sustaining it, there are only two realms in this world that mankind exists in: that which is under Satan’s control and the reign and rule of God in Christ Jesus. Through His powerful declaration of the Gospel Jesus not only tells us what He has done to redeem us from the devil’s control over our sinful nature but makes His reign and rule the reality for our lives, making His suffering and death to be price paid to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil, and His resurrection to be the sure and certain promise of our own future in His eternal kingdom where suffering and evil will be no more. In our world, as well as our own life, even the devils most nefarious plans must serve what Jesus has declared must happen before His return on the Last Day

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We can mistakenly see three realms: what is under God’s control which is the Church, what is under Satan’s control, which are evil things and people, and a middle ground like a “no-man’s land” that each side is trying to take. Therefore, we can see the evil that happen as the devil attacking and winning some of the battles, even as we want to believe Jesus will win the war. This makes us think that since He is not present in all His power and glory, He and His Word is sometimes ineffective the battle against Satan and his evil plans.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See the evil in our world and in our life not to be Satan winning the skirmishes, but that Christ is in control of all things outside of us and is protecting our souls by His indwelling Spirit who brings the power of Christ’s Gospel declaration to keep us in faith now unto life everlasting. Trust that Christ who protects us through Word and Sacrament.

Subject Sentence: Christ rules through His powerful word

Introduction: The Lions Battle in San Francisco

It's the battle of Good vs. Evil. Isn't that how we see tonight's football game? It's our Detroit Lions (the good guys) battling the evil enemy The San Francisco 49'ers. Now I'm not faulting you for seeing it this way. I certainly do to a large extent. The 49ers are the enemy and I want the Lion's to be victorious.

And I do believe it's going to be a battle. When you look at the two teams, you can see they are both talented in many of the same ways. The Lions have a good running game with the powerful David Montgomery and the speedy Jamyr Gibbs. But the 49ers have the very talented and athletic Christian McCaffery. Both have talented quarterbacks that can make spectacular throws, both have talented receivers who can make spectacular catches, and both have defenses that can make game changing plays.

All that being said there are some things about tonight's contest that make me uneasy. While Quarterback Jared Goff has been through this before, all the way to the Super Bowl with the Los Angeles Rams, which they won, most of the Lion's team has not. The last time the Lions made it this far was in 1992 when they played for the NFC championship against Washington and lost. But I, like most of you, are hoping tonight we will see history in the making for the Lions.

Another thing that makes me uneasy is that the Lions will have to win playing in enemy territory. It would be great if we were playing them in Detroit, on our home turf. I would be another thing if the game was being played in a neutral setting: a city where the fan base between the two teams was more or less equal. Playing with the home crowd on your side can make a big difference. The last two games that we played at home our hometown crowd rose to the occasion. Last Sunday, when we played the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the crowd noise reached a decibel level equal to that of a jet engine. Now, that kind of noise is going to be directed at us in San Francisco as Gerad Goff tries to call out plays at the line of scrimmage in .

It's always hard heading into enemy territory, that is unless you are Jesus. That's because even where it may seem like enemy territory, Jesus is always in control.

The Spiritual Realms of the World We Live In

Now there is one thing to keep in mind when we think of the world, especially from a spiritual sense. We often see everyone falling into three realms of influence and control.

There are those we know to be under Satan's control. In this realm we would include those who actively and openly worship Satan or are involved in occult practices. And we might also include those people who do evil in the world: those who commit heinous crimes, or world leaders like Putin and his attacks on the Ukraine, as well as terrorists who purposefully seek to harm and kill innocent civilians.

Then there is the realm of the Church which is under the influence and control of Jesus as His Body on earth. Beyond these two we see a 3rd realm that is kind of like a "no-man's land". In this realm we would put people that are not really evil, in that they don't do harmful hurtful things, in fact they may do good deeds to those around them, The difference is they don't believe in Jesus.

However, this is not the spiritual reality that you and I live in. There are really only two realms of influence: you either live under Satan's control in the kingdom of evil, or you live under the reign and rule of God. There is no middle ground. All human beings are born into that kingdom of evil because we are born under control of our sinful nature. This nature selfishly desires only what pleases us, only what we see as good for us. It firmly stands opposed to how God says we should live, making Him first place and others second, even so far as to love our enemies. Our sinful heart might go as far as to do something good for another person if we thought it would move them to do something good for us. Or we might be moved to do something good for someone else to appease the guilt we feel in our hearts. But God calls us to do works that show sacrificial and unconditional love for our fellow man, even those who consider us to be our enemies. And this just does not compute to our sinful nature.

We were born with a sinful nature that opposes God's will and desire for our lives. And this falls right into the hands of Satan. Everything he plans and does has the purpose of actively opposing the plans and will of God. So, our sinful hearts unknowingly at times fall right in line with his game plan. Now this does not mean that Satan possesses unbelievers. He doesn't have to. They already do his bidding following their sinful selfish hearts. But he can and does whisper into the ears and minds and encourages people to do hurtful and evil things to others. And demon possession is not a thing of the past either. It still goes on today, sometimes disguised as or called psychiatric disorders. This is not to say all are cases of demonic possession, but some certainly are.

Jesus in the Capernaum Synagogue

With that in mind let's look at our Gospel Lesson and Jesus' entrance into the Capernaum Synagogue. You might initially see this as a home field advantage since it's supposed to be a place to worship God. But many of those who attended had been blinded by the religious leaders of the day they believed salvation, and one's place in the kingdom of God depended solely on who you are and what you do. You had to be a circumcised blood relative of Abraham, in other words a Jew. And you had to keep the laws. The better you were at doing them the more pleased God was with you. If you messed up too bad or failed to live the kind of life the religious leaders deemed appropriate, they proclaimed you excluded from God's favor, His kingdom. Because they were trusting in themselves and not in God, they were the ones who were outside of God's kingdom. That synagogue was not "home field advantage" for Jesus.

In entering that synagogue Jesus was not entering "no man's land" either, since that doesn't exist. He was entering enemy territory. And our Gospel Lesson tells us He didn't hesitate but came boldly into enemy territory and immediately began teaching them the truth of God's Word. And how do they react? They are utterly amazed and astonished, not only with what He is teaching, but with the authority that He exudes in teaching it. The scribes, rabbis, and other religious leaders would read the Scriptures and then cite what other experts had to say about it. But Jesus' teaching has the power and authority of God Himself. This is the very author of the Scriptures expounding on them as only He can, saying "**Truly, truly, I say to you...**" It is a powerful Word, and it has a powerful effect on them.

Mark 1:23-24 ²³ **And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,** ²⁴ **"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."**

And not just them, but upon a certain man who was there who was possessed by an unclean spirit: in other words, a demon. He in particular is strongly affected by the presence of Jesus and His teaching with authority. He cries out "**What have you to do with us...?**" Notice the 2nd person plural "us", yet followed by the singular "I know..." If not for that second "I know" we might assume there is more than one demon present. While the demon could be alluding to all of the forces of darkness that he is a part of, keep in mind there are only two spiritual realms. What he is actually saying is, "**What business do you have with all of us here in this Synagogue who trust in their own works and are securely in the devil's kingdom. Why are you meddling in our affairs?**"

While it speaks with evil insolence, because the devil and his demons hate and despise God, there is also fear, "Have you come to destroy us?" The devil and his demons are painfully aware of what their end will be and that there is nothing they can do to stop it. And the demon, unlike everyone else in this synagogue, knows exactly who this man standing before it is: "The Holy One of God": God the Son incarnate, with all the power and authority of the Creating and Sustaining God at His disposal.

Mark 1:25-26 ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, **"Be silent, and come out of him!"** ²⁶ **And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.**

Here we see the power and authority of Jesus' words in action. He rebukes the demon, not just for its insolence, but for what it has done to this person whom God had given life to and loves very much. And then two powerful commands are given: **"Be silent, and come out of him!"** Be silent, or more accurately "Be muzzled" or "Not another word out of you". And then "Come out of him" or powerfully "Get out and be gone." And to both of these commands the demon must comply, it has no choice, because they have the power and authority of God Himself behind them.

The Power and Authority of Jesus Through His Word

Mark 1:14-15 ¹⁴ Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

Last Sunday we saw that Jesus had come into Galilee to "proclaim the gospel of God" which brings the kingdom, the reign and rule of God in Christ Jesus among men and into their hearts in a powerful way. It is the power of God in Christ as He invades the enemy territory of unbelieving hearts and minds with the same power and force that created this world and continues to sustain it. It is the message to all those who are bound by their sinful heart to sin, Satan, and eternal destruction, that God Himself in Christ Jesus has come to do all that is necessary to break those chains.

This is the message that Jesus has come to share: He is breaking all those chains by taking all of our sin and our punishment for it upon Himself. His suffering and death paid the ransom price necessary to save us from the kingdom of sin and death, to save us out of the devil's accusing grasp, and buy back our place in His kingdom, the reign and rule of the God who gave us life and loves us still. It's a powerful message that comes with the power and authority of God Himself. It is the Gospel Message that not only proclaims what Jesus has done for you but makes it your reality through His powerful gift of faith. His words of command move you to repent and give to you the power to believe by the faith delivered through the work of the Holy Spirit. This message has a power and authority that no demon can stand against.

Jesus Reigning and Ruling in the World

Jesus came into Capernaum to bring His reign and rule, His kingdom, into enemy territory, not by conventional weapons, they would have no effect in this spiritual battle. Instead, He uses a much more powerful weapon, the very word of God. It has the power to break sin, death, and the devil's hold over anyone and bring them into the reign and rule of God by faith.

Jesus is clearly and truly reigning and ruling in His Church. And He sends us out, not into 'no man's land', but into enemy territory. He sends us not on our own as sacrificial lambs, but with the Holy Spirit who is always present in the Gospel Message we share and proclaim, a message that is powerful enough to save people out of the devil's grasp and into the reign and rule of faith in Christ.

But what about that unbelieving world out there? There is certainly much evil and many who stand opposed to God and the Church. Are they beyond the power of God to do anything? NO! Christ rules over even those who do not believe in Him. His reign and rule through His declared word is absolute, even over those firmly in the devil's grasp. For all of the evil things that are happening in this world: wars, famines, natural disasters, man's inhumanity toward their fellow man; all of these are allowed by the permissive will of God. As Jesus has declared these are things that must happen to fulfill the will of God before He returns on the Last Day. They are evil and hurtful. They can look to us as if Satan and Jesus are engaged in hand to hand combat. While we may know, or at least want to believe that Jesus wins in the end, it often looks to us as if He is losing some of the battles. To use a football analogy, it may seem that while we are ahead by a touchdown, the enemy is driving down the field and keeps converting on 3rd and 4th down.

But the truth of the matter is that the enemy can only move as far down the field as the Lord allows. He is ruling over all things at the right hand of God. And not only will He win the game when He returns in glory on the Last Day, consigning the enemy to everlasting torment, He is winning all the downs in between. All the evil things that He allows in our lives serve His ultimate purpose: that all those He has calls would be saved from the devil's grasp and firmly held there by the power of His proclaimed word. Just as we might not understand why our team is going for it on 4th down until we see them make it or appear to be punting until we understand it was a trick play and the punter is throwing a pass for a first down, we may not always understand why the Lord allows to happen what He does.

But we hold fast to His powerful words to us: **Isaiah 55:8-9** ⁸ **For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.** ⁹ **For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** Our LORD often works in ways that we cannot understand. **1 Timothy 2:4** *(God our Savior)* **who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth** so that all He does and allows has this end in mind. And **Romans 8:28** **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.** All that He allows in your life and mine is for not necessarily our temporal good, but for our faith relationship with Him now leading into eternity to come.

Conclusion

I do hope the Lions win and make history. We will pray about the game coming up during the Prayers of the Church; not necessarily for their a Lions win, but that both teams remain safe and without serious injury. And we will pray that through this game, perhaps in the interviews with players that follow, as has happened in the past, that faith in Christ would be witnessed to. We will pray that the same thing happens in our lives, that Christ would be at work through His powerful word to break through the kingdom of darkness and unbelief and bring His reign and rule of faith to hearts and minds of those we encounter. And we know that He can certainly accomplish this because Jesus Christ is always in control at all times and in all places. Amen.