

St. Mark 1:21-28

Dear Friends in Christ,

A couple of months ago, I sat down and read through some excerpts from Gene Edward Veith, Jr.'s book, *"Postmodern Times - A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture."* The book was published in 1994 and is dated because we have quickly moved from Postmodern modern thinking to Post Christian thinking. But Veith, who was a guest speaker here some years back, set a good foundation for understanding where we are today. I want to read a portion from his book:

"...a megachurch pastor gives the example of a young man who says that he believes in Reformed theology, the inerrancy of Scripture, and reincarnation. He doesn't grasp that Christianity is incompatible with reincarnation... Even when this is pointed out to him, he shows no interest in revising his beliefs. Because he does not think in systematic terms, he does not see how different systems clash. He 'likes' the Bible, and he also 'likes' the thought of coming back in a different life.

"...But holding mutually contradictory ideas has become characteristic of the contemporary mind-set. Some politicians claim to be politically conservative, but liberal on social issues. Health, fitness, and organic food fanatics sometimes ravage their bodies by taking drugs...

"With no absolute canons of objective truth, the rational is replaced by the aesthetic (what's "beautiful" and makes me feel good). We believe what we like." (Crossway Books, publisher, 1994, pp.175-176)

A long time ago, King David wrote:

God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Ps. 53:2-3)

And that describes what Veith was saying, what drives the way so many think and what we see in our text for this day. Here's our direction . . .

IT'S NOT "WHAT". IT'S "WHO".

I. The One Who Has Authority.

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he 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. (vss. 21-22)

In his commentary on St. Mark's Gospel, Harold Wicke writes:

...Jesus did not teach as the teachers of the law did. They always appealed to the interpretations of past rabbis and were particularly adept at breaking down God's word into any number of legalistic regulations (you know, what they "liked"!) Jesus instead always proclaimed the good news on his own authority. ...in Jesus they were face to face with the final authority...His is the final word. (Wicke, *Mark, The People's Bible*, Northwestern Publishing House, p. 25)

Recall these words of Jeremiah: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23) People can like and think what they want. They can taste life in any flavor they choose. But behind it all is the One directing every human's steps. And,

with that, this statement from Proverbs: "A man's steps are from the Lord; how then can man understand his way?" (Prov. 20:24) The conglomeration of thinking we see - the absurdities - will be used and directed by someone - by the Lord! And for all this world's insanity, the One who has authority gives His people fair warning:

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation (i.e., wasted or harmful living), drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day (The Judgement Day - the Day when the One of authority puts an end to the miss-directed thinking of this day) will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of man." (St. Lk. 21:34-36)

And with that in front of us, look at what happens next . . .

II. The One Who Comes To Where We Are.

We start with these words preceding our text: "he entered the synagogue and was teaching." Simple enough. Christ enters a place of worship. The Word Himself is in the midst of people who are looking for the coming Messiah. He arrives!

And He is here, in this place of worship. Wherever the Word of God is present Christ is there because He is the Word. He went to where those people were - and He comes to where we are - speaking with authority; announcing forgiveness of all our vile and destructive sin.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. (vss. 23-26)

R. C. H. Lenski writes:

All that Mark says is that the man was...joined to such a spirit... His demon nature is brought out by the adjective "unclean," which predicates that every trace of moral purity was gone, and utter foulness had become this spirit's nature. (R.C.H. Lenski, St. Mark's Gospel, Augsburg Publishing House, p. 77)

When I read that I could not help but to think of the growing and accepted mockery that is made of moral purity, and the "utter foulness" that marks so much of this world and this culture at this time. I could not help but to recall those words of John:

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. (Rev. 20:2-3)

We say to you that the "he must be released for a little while" is where we are - in the "little while." The last part of the end. How long this "little while" is going to last is impossible to say. But we believe we are well into it. It is the Presence of Christ that must fill our lives; comfort, guide and strengthen us in this time. He is the One Who comes to where we are; He comes to us in Word and Sacrament. To not make daily use of these is to leave ourselves vulnerable to every sort of hellish attack. So, please hear this . . .

III. Not "What?" But the Word!

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." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. (vss. 27-28)

What's amazing here is that they ask, "What is this?" What is this?? That's not the question. The question must be "Who is this?" Do you remember the account of the healing of the paralytic who was lowered through the roof? Do you remember the first thing Jesus did with this man? We're told, "he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" (Mk. 2:5b)

And do you remember what happened next? Some Scribes were present, and it is reported, "(they) were questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" (Mk. 2:6-7) Friends, that's **Who** healed the paralytic, and that's **Who** we find in the Synagogue this morning: God! God in the flesh. The one Who alone can forgive the sins of every broken hearted sinner. It's not "What?". It's "Who". It's Jesus, the Lamb of God Who alone takes away every sin of every person.

No matter where we are, no matter how insignificant or significant the moment, no matter what any man thinks - no matter how threatening life might become, we can say with David - God help us to say: "But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand..." (Ps. 31:14-15a)

You see? It's not the "What". It's "Who"!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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I. The One who Has Authority.

II. The One Who Comes to Where We Are.

III. Not “What?” But the Word!

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