

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 29, 2006
4th Sunday after Epiphany
Mark 1:21-28
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Jesus Reveals His Power Base

If you want to display your power, you need a strong base underneath you. It is a lesson you learn from early on in life, isn't it? Don't you learn that playing "King on the Hill" as a kid? If you don't have your feet underneath you and someone pushes you, you are going to go tumbling down the hill. You learn it playing sports. When you go to box someone out, you need a strong base underneath you. If you want to block someone, you need a strong base underneath you. Those lessons that are taught in childhood sometimes play their way out also in our life. We don't throw our hips into each other anymore, but sometimes people build a base so that they can exhibit and display power. We talk about politicians and their power base and usually when you think of that, you probably come up with a picture of people saying what they think others want to hear so they can manipulate them and derive power from them.

One of the recurring themes in the church year during Epiphany is Jesus' power. He reveals his power. This morning we see him revealing his power base. It doesn't come from manipulating people. It doesn't come from doing anything for people except showing them love. But his power base comes from something that you and I can put our hands around each and every day of our lives. It is there. The question is—are we going to make use of that power base?—because his power base is the power that comes from his authoritative teaching. That is where you will find Jesus' power base. Then if you wonder about how effective that king of power is—this authoritative teaching—we see already here in this synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus has power that drives his enemies out at the speaking of a word. It is a power that is effective and a power that is needed in your life and my life. So he reveals his power base in his authoritative teaching.

The reading from Mark that we just heard takes place right after the one we heard last week where Jesus had called James and John and Andrew and Peter to leave their nets and to follow him now as full-time disciples, as learners of Jesus. Nine months (about) after he had been baptized, Jesus had called them and they followed him and we are told they went to Capernaum, which is also on the Sea of Galilee. When the Sabbath came, when Saturday showed up, Jesus did what it was his custom to do. He went to the synagogue. After nine months of his public ministry, he was recognized as a rabbi, a teacher. So they evidently asked him to teach because it says he *went into the synagogue and began to teach*.

This isn't the only time we hear of this when you read through the gospels. You remember at one other time when Jesus took the scroll from Isaiah and read about the

suffering servant and said, “These words are fulfilled in your hearing.” So it is something that happened a number of times. But that day, people’s jaws dropped—not just because they were falling asleep. People’s jaws dropped as Jesus taught them because he talked with authority. It says he taught with authority, not as the teachers of the law taught—the way they were used to being taught by those who would sit up and teach the books of Moses.

The teachers of the law—if you read what the teachers of the law of Jesus’ day wrote and what evidently they taught quite often, it was about God’s Word and about the laws, but not the Word itself. They wrote about and talked about what other rabbis had said about the Word. They got themselves twisted around and got focused on the law as the way to gain God’s favor. So they built their own paper fences around the law so that they thought they would be certain to be able to keep the law perfectly in their own minds. So they would talk about things like, “Well the Sabbath day it says, you shall not work. You shouldn’t do any work on the Sabbath.” So the debate came not about, “Why did God say this” and “What is God trying to tell us?” But “What is work and how can we avoid doing work?” So they said, “Well, on a Sabbath day you obviously have to walk, but now, how far can you walk and it changes from just not work to work.” So they came up with a number. They had a number. If you took this many steps you were okay. One more step and now you were working and now you broke the Sabbath. And now you weren’t going to be as good as they were because they could keep the law.

It’s kind of interesting that they spent all this time in God’s powerful Word, but the power eluded them and the purpose eluded them. Why?—because they didn’t teach with authority. Instead they taught what men had to say. They were listening to men that had missed the point.

Now you contrast that kind of teaching—talking around the Word, about the Word, but never touching on its power with Jesus. We aren’t told what he taught that day. But we are told it was with authority and we are told that it has power. You have to believe it is exactly what we heard he was going around teaching last week—repent and believe the good news. That he was teaching the good news of God—the good news that comes from God. Preaching both law—which shows us our sin and our need for a savior—and preaching the gospel—which shows us that Savior that would come and take away the sins of the world. And as he talked about the Word itself, as he proclaimed probably direct statements about the kingdom of God and what it was like and what it did, the people’s jaws started to hang open because they were hearing something that was unlike anything else they had ever heard. The power that was in the Word of God was touching their hearts. The power that was in the Word of God was opening their minds to understand salvation didn’t come from how many steps they took or didn’t take, but salvation came from God and that God is a loving God who gives what he demands.

He demands perfection of you and me. He still demands that of you and me—be perfect as the Lord your God is perfect. Be holy as the Lord your God is holy. Both Old and New Testament make those demands of you and me. Now it is easy, you can look around at the people around you and see that they are not perfect, right? That is not the hard part. But when we are honest, we see we are not perfect. It is not a matter of

degrees—“I’m more perfect than the person in front of me or behind me.” It is an absolute. Be perfect or you are not perfect. If you are not perfect, the wages of sin is death. Not, the wages of sin is a handicap so you have to work now harder to overcome it and you can still get right with God. The wages of sin is death.

Jesus’ authoritative word opened those truths to their minds and then showed them that he had come to be the answer. That he came to do what we couldn’t do—to be perfect in our place. That he kept the Sabbath perfectly every time in every day of his life—not by how much he walked, but by loving God and loving his Word and sharing that Word and upholding that Word and doing it all perfectly in our place because you and I don’t.

You and I don’t love the Word and love Word and worship more than we love the things of this world. We just don’t always do it perfectly, do we? Even though as Christians we know just how powerful the Word is, we know how powerful the Holy Spirit is and that he works through the Word and he works through the Sacraments—he doesn’t work through other things that he has told us, and yet we can find the time for the other things and not for the Word.

In the summer before I was vicaring, before the third year of my seminary training, I spent six weeks in Europe. I had a rail pass and a backpack and traveled by train all around Europe. When you spend about six hours on a train, you can only talk to the guy next to you for so long—the guy I traveled with—and you have to find something else to do. I can’t speak Italian, so talking to that old lady across the seat from me wasn’t going to do me any good. So I had a small pocket Bible with me that I read through twice and read the New Testament another two times. As I was doing it, I remember writing in the journal I was keeping about just how amazing it was and how much I looked forward to that. I was sitting by day in the Roman forum where Julius Caesar was killed and at night I couldn’t wait to get to the motel so that I could read the Bible again. I found that time and I carved out that time and I said, “Boy, when I get home, I am going to make sure I keep doing it.”

Guess what. I got home and I had experienced the power of God’s authoritative Word, and I didn’t keep doing it like I would like to. I have to believe you are the same way. You know how important God’s Word is, yet sometimes the newspaper or watching the news seems a little more important or a little more vital to our daily life than reading the Scripture. The authoritative Word is right there around us. We have it on video. We have it on audio tape. We have it in large print. We have it in small print. We have it with red letters. We have it with black letters. We have it in every way, shape or form and it is around us—it is in our homes, it is in our libraries—but is it always in our hands and in our eyes and in our hearts? No.

That is why it is amazing that our God loves us enough to die for even the times that you and I despise his Word. The times when a rerun on television looks more appealing than getting to know my Savior better—Christ died for those sins. He loved us in spite of the times that we have loved other things more than him. That is what is amazing. That is what makes God’s love for us in Christ so valuable and such a treasure to us, because the power that he has to take away sins is a power that he uses in love for people like you and me. We sin by despising the Word, or we may be right

now thinking, “You know, I am in the Word every day.” And the devil is there whispering in our ear, “Boy, if only God had more people like you, then the world would be a better place for Christians.”

Even when we are doing what God wants us to do, the devil can come in and tempt us towards pride. We sin, but we have a Savior who has taken away all sins because he never gave in to pride, because he always did the Father’s will perfectly and then he carried to the cross all the times that you and I have failed to. That is the truth that moves us to want to be in the Word, to want to be in it on our own, to want to be in it with our family, to want to be in it with our church family—not because we have to, but because we want to know God better. As I dig into his Word, you help me to do it at Bible Studies. Others help me to do it as I talk with them about the Word privately. That is why we want to—not because we have to—but because this is where we get to know God better.

The thing is that Satan knows that this is where we get to know God better, so he is going to come up with ways to try to keep us from doing it. For example, the synagogue, the people’s jaws are hanging down and they are saying, “Wow! What kind of teaching is this? This isn’t what I am used to?” What does the devil do? He says, “Oh, oh! I better distract them.” He has someone that is demon possessed in the back of the synagogue start screaming. He starts crying out things.

Okay. Someone in the back of our church, if they stood up right now and started shouting, would you remember anything that I have said up until this point the rest of the day? Or would you just remember that someone in the back of church shouted this morning. See what the devil is trying to do? He is trying to get the focus off of the authoritative teaching and onto anything else. That is why Jesus says, “*Be quiet!*” “*Come out of him!*” Right then and right there he shows that he has power over our enemy and over his enemy because with a shriek—can you imagine how that shriek must have echoed in people’s ears the rest of the day? With a shriek, the demon or demons came out of him. God displayed his power. Jesus spoke and action took place.

God uses his power and love to defeat the enemy. He cast the demon out of that man and the truth of the matter is when the devil comes to tempt us to look in other directions or look at ourselves or do the things that God says are wrong, Jesus still has power over our enemy. And when we look to him, he will help us to overcome. He will forgive us for the time that we have failed. He will strengthen us so that in the future we can live in a way that gives glory to him and not cave in to the devil’s temptations. But he has the power to do it. The question is—are we going to plug into that power or are we simply going to try to go through life on the reserve batteries of ourselves?

God’s love for us in Christ gives us the power that gives us the victory.