



Mark 1:21-28 - 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 evil 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 evil 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 evil spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Stand in awe of your Savior

-He speaks with authority

-He works with power



To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen

(Revelation 1:5b-6)

“That was amazing!” It was the only thing I could think to say. I was a little kid and we were on vacation up north at the lake, when I spotted a bald eagle soaring in the clouds – which was cool enough by itself. Then, suddenly it swooped down to the surface of the water and brought up an unsuspecting fish in its talons. I had never seen anything like that before. Believe it or not, I didn’t see too many bald eagles growing up in suburban Milwaukee. But when I laid eyes on that real life, National Geographic looking scene, all I could say was, “That was amazing!” When was the last time you were completely awestruck at something? I mean, really, honestly, sincerely eyes wide, mouth agape, dumbfounded, speechless, jaw dropped amazed? Maybe things don’t seem so extraordinary today because we’re surrounded by all sorts of technology that we take for granted, but people a century ago would have thought came straight out of science fiction: cars that can cruise at 75 mph – no problem; satellites that we shoot into space and orbit the earth, and in many of our pockets lives a cell phone that’s smarter than its owner. At one time, all of that stuff that would have been downright amazing or even impossible is now commonplace. Don’t get me wrong, I appreciate cell phones and remote controls as much as the next guy, but my question is this: have we lost our capacity for amazement? What once was awesome has now become common, ordinary, or even boring.

What happens when the awesome and amazing becomes common, ordinary, or boring in our spiritual lives? Maybe those old familiar Bible stories and promises become just that – old and familiar. Maybe that once cherished hymn we loved to sing with exuberance has come to sound more like a funeral dirge...and since when does it have seven stanzas? We handle the once cherished treasures of God’s revelation like they were another chore to complete or some inconvenience in our day. That’s a real danger for every Christian – to let the Word and work of your Savior God become so commonplace that it really doesn’t hold much importance in life. Maybe it’s happened to you – it’s happened to me. When we no longer marvel at the grace and love of our God; when worship is a job rather than a joy? And so it happens that the unbounded God of the universe becomes neatly compartmentalized to fit into our lives when we think we need him. God forgive us! When the amazing becomes common for you – remember just how awesome your Savior is. He speaks with authority. He works with power, and he does it all for you.

Mark tells us, **They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.** Nothing out of the ordinary here. Jesus and his disciples go to the place where the Jews gathered for worship. It was just another Sabbath Saturday, just another hum-drum service of lessons, a psalm or two, some prayers. Another Sabbath, another song, another visiting rabbi to offer a commentary on Scripture – telling us all about which laws were more important to follow than the others, how many steps we could take on our Sabbath walk, how much mint, dill, and cumin to tithe this month. Just another Sabbath Saturday – but then Jesus showed up. **The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.** As soon as Jesus sat down and began to teach, the people in that synagogue realized there was something different about not just this teacher, but the teaching he brought. Every other rabbi who sat in the teacher’s chair appealed to other respected rabbis of old to back up his interpretation. Everyone cited their sources, appealed to human authority, and perpetuated the teaching about a god who demands that we climb the ladder to attain his righteousness rather than the God who comes to us to save us.



What was so amazing about Jesus' teaching? It was something they'd never heard before, but something they'd been asking for since the time of Moses. In our first lesson from Deuteronomy 18, the people of Israel had pleaded with Moses for God to communicate with his people in some other way than making the mountains shake and the earth tremble, complete with consuming fire and billowing smoke. They said, **"Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see his great fire anymore, or we will die."** Here, in the synagogue in Capernaum, God answered the peoples' plea with a preacher who would not send them to death but win them to life. In flesh and blood right before their eyes, was God's answer to humanity's greatest need. The very authority of God drew near to them not to destroy, but to save. Jesus Christ comes to proclaim release to the prisoners, forgiveness to the sinners, and light and life to those in the shadow of death. This is good news! The Son of God takes on our humanity so that he can take on our sin and reconcile us to a holy God. This is good news!

But not everyone was so happy about it. True to form, wherever the Word is proclaimed, the devil loves to rear his ugly head. **Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "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!"** So, who was this demon possessed man, and why does he cry out now? Mark's gospel account doesn't tell us. But it makes some sense for the devil to cry out and try to disrupt and destroy now. What had been taught in that synagogue on the other Sabbath days? Rules and regulations; traditions and tithes; how you can distinguish yourself with a life of obedience to Almighty God, and hold up your crowning achievements to God – thanking him that you're not like your unworthy neighbor. If that's the content of what was being taught, it makes all the sense in the world for the devil to keep his mouth shut. The devil is pretty content to remain quiet in a place where falsehood reigns and self-righteousness marches the soul away from God. But when confronted with the truth of the gospel – about a God who justifies the ungodly, about a Savior who carried our every sin to the cross, and rose from the dead to guarantee our eternity – when the devil hears that, you'd better believe he's working overtime to divide and destroy, raising up strife so that people walk away from the truth.

You'll notice a distinct difference in the two main voices you heard in our gospel lesson today: Jesus has authority with his teaching. The devil simply makes noise. Making noise is no substitute for having authority, but isn't it fascinating how often people are confused by the two? The truth of God is twisted or just plain ignored in order to accommodate the most recent group of people looking to justify their ungodly lifestyles. People turn their backs on the pure gospel message and trade it for whatever their sinful nature desires. The devil promises fulfillment, acceptance, and joy, but only delivers emptiness, rejection, and despair. At any given moment in this assembly, there are two sermons being preached simultaneously – one by the guy up front, and the other by the devil, just making noise. It's sad to say that sometimes we lend our ear to the wrong one. *God is in THIS PLACE? Doesn't look like much – not like that church down the street. You can see that's just another human being standing up there, not Jesus. If he knew what kind of person you really are and all the things you've done, there's no way he'd be talking about forgiveness. You do realize those are just words on a page, written who knows how long ago, for people so far removed from your present existence, right?* When the devil comes calling, it's time again to stand in awe of your Savior. He speaks with authority, he works with power, and he does it all for you.

In answer to the devil's taunts, Jesus said, **"Be quiet! Come out of him!"** **The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.** The powerful and authoritative word of Jesus commands the devil to flee, and he must listen. When those people from the Capernaum synagogue went home that Sabbath day, what do you think they remembered from their time in worship? *Well, there were some prayers and lessons. The visiting rabbi began to teach, and then a guy with a demon stood up and started shouting.* Kind of hard to remember the sermon when there's an exorcism in the middle of it, right? Well, that wasn't the case with those people in Capernaum. What struck them most about that Sabbath day? **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 evil spirits and they obey him.” The powerful and authoritative word of Jesus always wins when it’s pitted against the noise of the devil. Jesus speaks with authority and he works with power. At this point, if you’re thinking it might be more accurate to say Jesus *spoke* with authority back then and *worked* with power once upon a time, I’d ask you to look again. Jesus came into the world to destroy the devil’s work, and Jesus still does it today. That same powerful and authoritative word of Jesus always wins when it’s pitted against the noise of the devil, the lies of your sinful nature, or the guilt of your conscience.

What did you expect when you came into this place at this time on this day? Another Sunday, another church service. Another couple hymns, some readings, a psalm and a sermon. It all looks so common, so ordinary, so boring. But then Jesus shows up – but don’t wait for a public exorcism to take place. Instead look where Jesus has promised to be. Jesus shows up in feeble words spoken by a cracked clay pot before you – *I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, and do you know what? That word of promise carries with it the authoritative word of Jesus Christ himself. It all looks so common, so ordinary, so boring, but then Jesus shows up - in water and word over a sinful creature to claim him as his own and adopt him. In the waters of your baptism, God has forgiven you and made you his child. Jesus has died the death of your sin, broken the devil’s grip, and rescued you from his demonic dominion forever. It all looks so common, so ordinary, so boring, but then Jesus shows up. The Son of God places his body and blood into your hands and on your lips, as you hear the words, “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*” The devil’s accusations against you can’t stick – because you’re mine. Do you believe me now? **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.** He speaks with authority. He works with power, and he does it all for you.

So where do you find yourself on the spectrum of amazement today? Words like “amazing” and “awesome” have kind of lost their power and punch in our modern culture of rapidly advancing technology. But God help us always to stand in awe of our Savior Jesus, and to see what’s really going on here. Every time we gather around his Word and Sacraments, such a celebration points us ahead to the day when the veil of humility will be pulled away and we’ll see with our own eyes the glorious power of our God as he destroys the work of the devil forever and brings us to himself in heaven. But until that day comes, stand with your eyes of faith wide open. Stand in awe of your Savior. He speaks with authority, he works with power, and he does it all for you.

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen

(Jude 24-25)