

“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 month of January and part of February is the season of Epiphany. We have been reading through the first chapter of Mark as the beginning of His ministry helps reveal who He is. From his baptism in the Jordan when the voice of the Father came down saying, **“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,”** to the calling of the first disciples, Jesus then moves on to His first miracles. We learn today: **THE HOLY ONE OF GOD AMAZES BECAUSE HIS AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING CLEANSSES.**

First, I. Unclean spirits cannot stand the holy one's authoritative teaching. Our text begins, **“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.”**

Did you ever have someone at work who was the authority? He doesn't need to consult the manual. He *is* the manual. It always seemed like a conflict of interest when the professor assigned a textbook that was written by him himself. “I already am paying you thousands to lecture to me, and now you want me to give you even more money by you getting a commission on your book?”

When Jesus taught, He wasn't referencing what other teachers and rabbis said. He simply told it like it was. Why? Because He is the authority. He wrote the book! **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Not only did the attendees of the Synagogue notice the teaching, the forces of darkness did, also. **“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.’”** From the crowd comes the voice of a demon challenging Jesus.

James writes, **“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”** It's not enough to know who Jesus is. The demons knew who Jesus is, but they knew He was going to destroy them. Demons still exist, and they seek to drown out the word and disrupt Jesus' teaching. They know they can't beat Him, but they can at least distract you from Him.

Christian author C.S. Lewis, more famous for having written the Chronicles of Narnia, also wrote many other Christian books, one of which is titled, *The Screwtape Letters* which imagines a series of letters of an experienced demon to his apprentice on how to prevent a man from believing in Jesus.

In this book, there are all sorts of tips and tricks Screwtape gives. If someone wants to read the Bible, have him wait until after lunch then distract him in the

meantime. If he prays, let the prayers be vague. If he goes to church, make him distracted by the judgmental people he sees sitting in the pew. In one place Screwtape writes, “Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

Demons may not be as evident in today’s modern world, but they still cannot stand Jesus and his authoritative teaching. They will tempt you with distractions. They will want to sow division and discord in a congregation. They will make you believe something like sleep, sports, or breakfast is more important than what goes on here on a Sunday morning. As our society veers further and further away from the Gospel, they may come out of the shadows, but that remains to be seen.

But the good news is that II. The Holy One's authority cleanses. **“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.”**

Now, we may be confused at Jesus rebuking the demon and telling him to be silent. The demon was telling the truth, right? But the messenger is just as important as the message. When a celebrity does something illegal, even before a preliminary hearing, the first people who react are the advertisers. One off color online post can cost a celebrity millions of dollars in sponsorships. Why? Because the person who carries the message matters.

Jesus didn't want His main spokespeople to be the demons. No wonder at first many people thought Jesus was in line with the devil, because the demoniacs all knew who he was and the Pharisees must have thought they were lying.

In a previous sermon I mentioned Louie Zamperini, the man from the biography *Unbroken* who survived days on the open ocean and horrendous treatment in a World War II Japanese POW camp. The part that Hollywood leaves out of the adaptation of the book is Louis’ life after the war. He fell into alcoholism and his marriage was at the brink of failure.

His wife went to one of Billy Graham’s crusades and she became a Christian, and she urged Louie her husband to come to listen to Billy Graham. The first reaction that Louie had to hearing Graham’s sermon was anger. He went in kicking and screaming. Only eventually did the Holy Spirit have His way with Louie and he received the peace which passes all understanding and a release from his addiction and a rescue of his marriage.

Just like the demoniac convulsing the man and crying out with a loud voice, should we be surprised when the demons fight back? Should we be surprised when we share our faith with a friend or relative, that the message is initially received with anger or rejection? Christian speaker Christopher Yuan documents his initial rejection of his faithful Christian parents. He tore up his mother’s letters, and when his dad gave Christopher his beloved first Bible, Chris threw it in the trash.

But the wonder is that the demon did come out of the man by the authority of Jesus. The one who is the Word of God in the flesh has the power to drive out demons and make them subject to Him.

We are bombarded by so many temptations and things that would draw us away from God. But greater is He who is in us, than He who is in the world. Jesus is calling you to listen to His teaching and receive His forgiveness in the places He promises to be: in His Word, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion where His body and blood are truly there in with and under bread and wine for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Jesus promises His authority to drive out our demons, to free us from sin addictions, and to release us from fears and anxieties.

If Jesus is powerful to cleanse the demoniac and authoritative to teach on God's Word. Know that He is enough. You don't need to rely on anything else to bring you satisfaction—not your 401(k), not your family, not your horoscope, not your GPA. He is mighty to cleanse your sins and bring you peace and hope, and that's the best good news we can bring to anyone.

Finally, III. The authoritative teaching amazes the world around us. Our text continues, **“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.”** We see the amazement of the crowds from both the teaching and the exorcism. The two go hand in hand.

We go out these doors later today, and we don't have a special halo on our heads. However, we get to be the hands and feet of Jesus wherever we go, and we carry that authoritative word as the Holy Spirit dwells in us and fills us with Himself. We live in a world looking for something amazing.

Now, we may not know many or any people who are demon possessed, but we do know people who struggle with an unclean spirit. Simply put, these are those who do not yet know Jesus as their savior. If the Holy Spirit isn't in you, the only alternative is an unclean one. There are those who struggle with an unclean conscience, impure thoughts, and soiled actions.

If you have someone in your life that you want to be cleansed, that is, to know Jesus as her lord, start by praying for her. Prayer will move you to action, caring for them and loving them. Sit down with this person and don't just talk about Jesus, but pray *with* them and read Scripture with them. There's power in God's Word to change hearts just as it did in that Synagogue in Capernaum. I know that sounds scary, and that's also an encouragement to read Scripture yourself if you haven't done so already.

We can go out with courage and hope, just as Jesus did knowing that He has the authority to change people's lives, and has the willingness to make us clean.