

St Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Epiphany 4 – January 29<sup>th</sup> and February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009

### **Mark 1:21-28**

**<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup>The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup>Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup>“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!”**

**<sup>25</sup>“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” <sup>26</sup>The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.**

**<sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.**

Dear Children of God,

People like routines, don't they? They set their alarm clocks the same each day. They leave the house almost at the same time each day. They drive the same route to work each day. They know just about how long it will take to get to work each day. Many people eat their meals at the same time every day or go to bed at the same time each day. Routines are good. They help us to be where we need to be at the right times. One of the routines that I remember from growing up was how important Sunday morning were. I grew up in Milwaukee and attended St. Marcus Lutheran Church in the inner-city of Milwaukee. We lived about 20 minutes away from Church so we would have to get up early enough so that we would get there in time to find our seats. We always sat on the right side about 2/3 of the way down. St. Marcus was an older church with huge stain glass windows, with the two largest ones over 30 feet high and 20 feet wide. We had some of the older traditions which were a part of my routine. We knelt on the floor during the confession of sins. You knelt again on the floor after you returned from the Lord's Supper, as you thanked God for forgiving your sins in the Lord's Supper. I always knew what was going to happen on Sunday and it never grew old to go to church, to be in God's house where you could gather together with fellow Christians.

As we gather today in God's house, I would like to ask you a question. What kind of routine do you have for worship? Do you know that every Sunday morning or every Thursday night at this certain time, we will get up and get ready so that we can be in God's house to hear God's Word? Is Sunday a special day for you – a day where you know exactly what you are doing and where you will be going? Today in our text, we are going to see part of the routine in Jesus' ministry as he went to the synagogue which was his Church on the Sabbath Day. So this will be our theme for today:

### **Sermon Theme: Come To Church with Jesus!**

- 1. To receive his miracle**
- 2. To share his Word**

Do you remember our Gospel lesson from last week? It was the part of God's Word where Jesus called Peter and his brother Andrew as well as James and his brother John the sons of Zebedee to be his disciples – to be fisher of men. At first glance the first verse of our text seems rather insignificant. **“<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.”** What did Jesus do? It was the Sabbath which was their day of worship and he was in Church. How many times did Jesus go into the synagogue to teach? More times than we can count. And why? He went there to teach the people who were in the synagogue that week, which most certainly would have

included his disciples. It was part of Jesus' routine to be in his Father's house of worship every week.

One of the things that happens when you fly on airplanes is that the airline attendant makes you listen to their whole talk about where the exits are and how to use the life preservers if you land in water and so on. What do most people do when this is being presented? They say, I know this stuff and I've heard this lots of times already and they don't really listen. But what would you do if you actually had to do what the flight attendant was describing like when the airplane crashed in the Hudson River. They said that there were some people who forgot to grab their life preservers and many of the people didn't have them on correctly because they didn't listen. They thought they knew everything, but they really didn't. Thankfully it worked out well for all of them

I think that many of the people who are irregular in their Church attendance think Church is like the flight attendant giving her little talk. I've heard this all before, I know what God is all about, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Maybe this leads us to a valid question, why do we go to Church each week? I know that there are some people who might find it hard to answer that question. They might wonder what am I getting out the service today or is it really all that beneficial. Some people might say that it makes me feel better, but what does that actually mean? How do we feel "better" after coming to Church? Jesus obviously went to Church to preach the truth about the Savior, which was himself. We go to Church for a number of reasons, the greatest being the fact that we will hear the simple truth that Jesus has indeed been perfect in my place, that Jesus did indeed die on a cross in my place, that Jesus has prepared a place in heaven for me. We hear boldly and clearly each week that message which is filled with God's authority that we are lost and condemned sinners, but our sins are forgiven. That is why we go to Church and every one of us needs to hear this message. My guess is that you have heard this message hundreds of times, but I pray that we realize why it is so important to hear it again and again. Our eternal welfare is at stake.

What kind of response did Jesus get after he taught? **"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup>The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."** They were amazed, because he taught as one who had authority which was quite different than the message that they normally heard from the teachers of law. To help us understand this, we need to remember what the teachers of law would have preached. They most often would have preached a message that was based more on following the man-made rules set up by the Pharisees or the traditions that were passed on from generation to generation. They may have quoted Scripture and they might have known Scripture, but they most often just talked about Scripture. They never really explained what the Scripture truly meant for lost sinners.

As we come to Church, what is going to be the center of all that we do? It is going to be the hearing and reading from God's Word. God's Word when it used with all of its power, both Law and Gospel, is full of authority. One of the teachings that we teach our young people in Catechism and even earlier in the education is a teaching called the Verbal Inspiration of God's Word. To refresh our memories, what is this teaching again? While this teaching may not get talked about each and every week it needs to be remembered every time that we open God's Word. It is the teaching that God, the Holy Spirit, moved or led each of the writers of God's Word to write down exactly what he wanted. This means that God wrote every word through the earthly pens of human writers. Since God wrote it, it is full of his authority. When we teach it and learn it trusting that all of it is God's Word, we begin to realize what a miracle it is every time God's Word is preached to us or we open it. It is a miracle because God's Word has so much authority that it is able to convict our sinful hearts and then change our sinful hearts to believe in Jesus alone as our answer to sin. Each week in Church we get to witness this miracle again and again as our hearts and faith are strengthened.

And just in case his words were not enough authority, we see more from Jesus, **"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup>"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!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" <sup>26</sup>The evil spirit shook the man violently and came**

**out of him with a shriek.”** We are not going to spend too much time talking about demon possession, but it certainly is something that was much more talked about during Jesus’ time. This does not mean it couldn’t happen today and there seems to be documented cases in our times, but that is not really the main issue. The main issue is that the Devil is persistent. He may have lost the battle with Jesus out in the wilderness, but he is not easily deterred. He is like the “Energizer Bunny.” He keeps going and going and going. It is also interesting to note that the Devil knew very well why Jesus was on this earth, **“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!”**. He knew better than many of the people who heard Jesus on regular basis. The Devil knew that Jesus had come to destroy the Devil and his power. We see that Jesus ordered the demon out the man and that is exactly what happened. Jesus won! The demon lost!

As we live our lives, we see the Devil at work in much more subtle ways. He uses false teachers who distort the pure message of the gospel and mingle in works-righteousness. He uses false teachers who eliminate the work of Jesus, the very Son of God who came to redeem all people from their sins. The Devil uses false religions like the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons who use Christian terminology, but don’t believe in Jesus as their only way to heaven. But no matter what the Devil might throw our way, we know that we have a refuge in Jesus who already won the victory over the Devil. Jesus showed us the ultimate authority when conquered the Devil on the cross and even defeated death itself by rising on the third day.

It is only a couple weeks ago when the pilot safely landed the airplane in the Hudson River and every passenger and crew member was saved. People used words like amazing and a miracle to describe the events of that day. The pilot and his co-pilot became instant heroes. They received hero welcomes everywhere that they went. It got me to thinking. What happened when the people heard Jesus that day in the synagogue and saw the miracle of the casting out of the demon? **“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.”**<sup>28</sup>**News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”** The word that was used was that they were, “Amazed”. It isn’t an accident that the people were amazed. God’s powerful Word had hit their hearts. Their hearts were on fire as they spread the news about a man who preached with authority and even had the authority to drive our demons.

As we sit here in God’s house today or maybe in the middle of summer or maybe next Advent season, I want you to think about what just happened. Today or any day that we hear the message of God’s Law and Gospel which is working in sinful hearts like mine and yours – an amazing miracle happened. And it is more than a few hundred passengers on a plane who were saved from an earthly death, but it is billions and billions of people whose souls were saved from a fire crash in the pit of hell. I pray that every time we think about why we come to God House, we recognize that we are coming to hear Jesus speak to us with authority and love and grace. I pray that see the miracle that happens every time we hear the sweet yet simple truth that lost sinners like us actually have a home in heaven by God’s grace alone. And I pray that we like the people at Jesus time take the time and effort to spread the good news about this wonderful miracle that God has given to all people in the form of his one and only Son who gave his life on the cross to defeat all sin and to win the victory over the Devil. Amen