

Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

4th Week After Epiphany

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Mark 1:21-28

Jesus Reveals Himself in Word & Work

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We probably all remember that kid when we were growing up who was the big talker – the one who said that he could do anything, and the one who said that he was scared of nothing. We all probably ran across a person like that when we were younger. Were they ever everything they claimed to be? Certainly not, right? They were mostly all talk. We probably realized this when we found something that they were afraid of, and when we saw something they

couldn't do.

This is not only a child's phenomena is it – to talk big? All sorts of adults make promises that they can't keep either. We have probably heard certain politicians promising to do things if they're only elected and then have never seen the fruition of those promises. About a person like this it has often been said that they can talk the talk, but they can't walk the walk – meaning their actions don't back up their words.

The sad result is that a lot of people say things that they can't back up. We might love what these people say, it may sound good, it may make us respect them, and even support them, but if they never do anything to back up what they say, well, how can we believe in them? How can we put our trust in them? In our lesson for this morning you could say that Jesus backed up his words. Jesus revealed himself in Word and work. In other words not only did Jesus talk the talk but he also walked the walk.

Jesus' talk was different from everybody else's. Mark tells us, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Their religious leaders were the Pharisees. They were the self-proclaimed experts of God's laws. They thought you could get to heaven by keeping God's laws. They even added hundreds of their own laws to the laws of God. They said: "God commands: 'No labor on the Sabbath day.' So if you take more than one hundred steps – that is work and a sin. God also commands you to tithe or give ten percent. When you pick figs from the trees, you have to set aside every tenth fig. When you add seeds to your food, every tenth seed has to be set aside for God." Worst of all, they were more concerned about how their own image as impressive teachers than about the immortal souls of the people.

Jesus' teaching was very different. He didn't speak of trivial matters. He loved the souls of the people. His words had authority and power because they were God's own word. He swept aside all the human traditions and told the people that God demands perfection, and if you're not perfect you won't go to heaven. He said God judges your inner thoughts and attitudes as well as outward actions. You have dirty thoughts. God sees them and you committing adultery before God. God sees your hatred for others, and that is murder. When the people asked, Who then can be saved? Jesus didn't hesitate: For you it's impossible. But then he added these comforting words: but nothing is impossible for God. Then he warmed their hearts: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but has everlasting life. He invited them: Come to me, and I will give you rest. He promised them: If anyone comes to me, I'll never turn him aside. His words had a powerful effect on the people who listened. His words had real power of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine that you are working for an oil company and are sent to live in Iraq. The authorities learned that insurgents were going to be launching rockets at your house within the next hour. Cell phone frequencies were jammed in the part of the city where you lived, so messengers had to be sent to each home. A messenger came to your house and said, "Say, I certainly like your taste in decorating. Have you ever thought of moving the couch to the wall? By the way, if your house gets damaged, here is my card, give me a call." Another messenger bangs on your door and calls: "I have some very urgent news. Your home is in danger. I am able take you to a safe place. Follow me!" Which message will have an effect?

Jesus' words had real power, the power of God's Holy Spirit. His words cut deep into greedy tax collectors like Matthew and Zacchaeus and changed them from takers to generous givers. His words warmed the hearts of fishermen like Andrew, Peter, James, and John and made them fishers of men. His words turned a sinful woman of the street into a sincere worshiper of the Savior who happily washed his feet with her tears. Our powerful Jesus has powerful words for you that gives you the same kind of peace. He promises forgiveness for all your sins and walked the walk all the way to the cross to die for you. At your baptism he made a personal promise to you that you belong to him and he will never leave you or abandon you. He walked the walk by sending the Holy Spirit into your heart to remind you of these promises and he continues to provide and care for his children

both physically and spiritually. In the Lord's Supper he puts his own body and blood into your body and blood and says, "For you, for the forgiveness of your sins."

Jesus not only spoke powerful words of love and forgiveness. His actions matched his words. There was a man in our true story who was possessed by an powerful demon. He was probably the kind of man most of us would avoid, the kind that wanders into the middle of a busy street and talks to imaginary people or yells inappropriate things at inappropriate times. The powerful demon inside this man yelled at Jesus: "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." No hocus pocus. No waiting for television cameras to start rolling. Jesus saw a man in desperate need, and he acted on it. Demons are incredibly powerful, but Jesus is far more powerful. With a few short words he drove the powerful demon out of the man.

Jesus' whole earthly ministry like that, it was powerful love in action. He did not look down his nose at the lowly but sat down with them at meals, fed them, healed them, and lifted them up. He did not turn his back on people caught in sin but turned his face toward them with a forgiving smile. He did not avoid non-Israelites but went out of his way to care for the spiritual needs of a Samaritan woman working at a well, a Roman soldier with a sick servant, and a Syrian woman with a demonized daughter. Time and again he demonstrated his mercy for all. Jesus' actions matched his words. 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." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

What an important and extremely relevant text for us today! You ask relevant? We've never witnessed any demon-possession nor even heard of any outside of some less than credible television shows and movies. How is this relevant for us today? Well, it is true that Satan has seemed to lessen his assaults on us by means of demon-possession, for we do not recognize many such cases anymore – but maybe that's the problem, that we don't recognize them? Wouldn't you agree that Satan has possessed our culture to undermine Jesus' authority? Look around and what do you see? The Holy Bible is no longer God's Word but just filled with old time stories and myths. Thanks to today's science we now know what God's Word is really about. That people weren't demon possessed but had sever mental problems. There is no such thing as Satan. And so Satan works to undermine God's Word and power in our lives through our culture. That it doesn't matter what I television shows I watch, it doesn't matter what music I listen to, it doesn't matter what comes out of my mouth, it doesn't matter what I store on my Ipod or post on my facebook, because I am protected! I am a member of a church and even have taken Bible class. So that means I can live like everyone else and it won't affect me! What we need is God's power of the law to hit us where it hurts and to wake us up to the fact that even one sin damns us to hell. This is what we deserve.

And the so called experts of today say that this text isn't relevant for us? The people sitting in that synagogue heard the same thing that you sitting here today hear. They sat there in amazement at Jesus' teaching. God should judge us to hell, but Jesus you are taking our place? What love! That is amazing! He doesn't tell us what we need to do in order to be saved – he tells us how we are saved. We are told in His Word that even though our sins separate us from God and that he detests sin, we don't have to face the punishment our sin deserves. We are told that Jesus, God's own Son, came and lived here in this world as our perfect substitute. All those sins we couldn't resist – he did. We're told that he suffered the full torment of hell in payment for our sins. That is what we should've had to do! But he did it! Amazing!

We don't know what lies ahead in 2012, or even what will happen this coming week. But we know that God's love will be there, God's grace will be there, and his power! God talks the talk in here, and he walks the walk with you in your life. When the Lord spoke, the demon was over powered and had to leave. When the Lord spoke on the cross he took on our sin and destroyed it. When the Lord speaks in your life through his Word, see his power over all things to make it work for your eternal good, and the worries we have can shriek out of us and leave. As Our Lord talks the talk in our lives, and as we see him walking the walk with us, we can and we will walk the walk through those back doors in confidence under his strength and grace because what Jesus says is what Jesus does. Whatever the devil might try to say through our hardships, what can we say through Jesus' power at them? When sickness comes we say "Be quiet" The Lord is my real doctor! For he has taken care of my soul for eternity. When we are tempted to give up because of old age, for those of us who feel weak we can say to weakness, "Be quiet!" I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. When I am weak, then I am strong in the Lord.

Come hardship or heartache, sickness or old age or even death – our powerful Jesus is with us. We are perfectly secure in his powerful, loving arms that defend us, arms that that will never let you go. May we now walk the walk of faith as we tell other about Jesus’ amazing teaching. Amen.