

Christ To The World - Holy

Mark 1:21-28

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As Jesus is to the Church, so the Church is to be to the world.

This one sentence summarizes everything that we as a church are about.

It is the core of our existence.

Miss this - and we miss the whole deal.

Nail it - and nothing else matters.

As Jesus is to the Church, so the Church is to be to the world.

This is central to our summer study of the Gospel of Mark.

Remember it, please, as we reflect on today's passage -

Mark 1:21-28, p.35 (New Testament)

Mark doesn't spend much time on the teachings of Jesus. His gospel is more of an adventure action film kind of story about Jesus.

As far as the content of the teaching goes, all we get is a quick summary in verse 15:

"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

What Mark **DOES** emphasize is that Jesus taught... as one with **authority**.

The phrasing here about "**authority**" doesn't mean the sort of authority that comes with a degree or professional credentials - like, say, a lawyer being authorized to handle your case because she has been credentialed by the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Rather the wording in the Bible's original language references a kind of inner power and presence that demands attention -

- When he speaks, you listen.

- When he orders, you do.

When Jesus speaks, something is going to happen - guaranteed.

When Jesus comes on the scene, things won't stay the same - that's for sure!

Because he has authority.

Which made the people feel really uncomfortable.

Perhaps as uncomfortable as Stephen Harper felt watching Michael Ignatieff walking up his driveway this past week, knowing that whatever Mr. Ignatieff said at their meeting would be something he'd have to take seriously.

He'd not be able to fluff it off.

The words of the Leader of the Opposition carried consequences.

Because they have a certain authority. There is legal power behind them that can carry certain consequences.

Jesus has that kind of authority.

Mark also records that the people were "**astounded**" at his teaching.

It was the sort of word used to describe a group of people who were comfortable in their way of life and were worried that the proverbial apple cart was going to get knocked over. (Lane, *Mark*, p.72)

The people were **unsettled** by what they heard.

It was very apparent that it was not "same old, same old" with Jesus..... which was probably what a lot of them had come to the synagogue expecting that week.

"Same old, same old."

A bit of inspiration.

A little fellowship.

Some prayers.

And home for roast beef.

"How was church, dear?"

"Oh, lovely."

Religion can become that way, don't you find?

Routine. Familiar.

You know what is expected, and you are able to fit it within the rest of your life.

But that's not what Jesus came to bring.

And -

That's **not** what the worshippers in that Galilean synagogue got.

It was a case of:

Whoa - what's this?

Well, it seems that not only the people were uncomfortable.

So was the spirit world.

We're not given an elaborate description, but it seems that some sort of dark spirit entity had taken up residence inside one of the worshippers. And this unclean being became rattled when Jesus began to speak.

The presence of Jesus affects, you see, the seen world and the unseen.

Which is not something we think about too much in our scientifically-obsessed culture. For many Canadians it is a case of if you can't see it, smell it, feel it, or somehow measure it, than by and large it can't be too significant. And probably doesn't exist.

That kind of mindset has affected many Christians, too. Causing some to ignore the whole reality of the spirit world. Which is rather strange for a group of people who confess to believe in God, don't you think?

Nevertheless, there it is. People do.

I'm amazed at the number of Christian teachers and writers who display a real sort of academic arrogance, foolish arrogance really, on this subject. They seem to think that belief in demons as real, live spirit entities is somehow backward - the sort of dim talk that is befitting of Salem witch trials, or the stuff of prescientific cultures who don't know any better. So they say things like, "*We need to grow up beyond such limited ideas.*"

Synod, the national assembly of the Christian Reformed Church, which met this past week in Chicago, reaffirmed to the churches that indeed these dark forces **do** exist, and we as believers need to be alert and wise about that.

Be alert. Be wise. And deal with them in accordance with how scripture deals with them. Demons, unclean spirits - however you want to refer to them - are rarely referenced in the New Testament, except in the context of being cast out .

Which is different than lots of other literature from that time period which had *all sorts* of speculations on demons.

But **NOT** the New Testament.

It acknowledges those forces.

And clearly displays Jesus' power over them.

And leaves it at that.

Which would seem to indicate that God doesn't want us to be spending much time in this stuff. It doesn't pay to spend time speculating about regional powers, or rankings within the demon world, or names of demons.

What matters is getting rid of them.

Not with flashy shows, or manifestations.

But with the power of Heaven.

With God's authority that comes through Jesus Christ.

When and if you ever encounter such forces, speak simply and clearly in the name of Jesus, and declare His power over them and your submission to the Son of God, and order them to leave.

Period.

Don't make it any more complicated than that.

One person shared with me this week their story of such an encounter.

A near relative prayed that Satan would have this person, shortly after their birth.

Another near relative, believer in God, prayed for God's protection and gave a special blessing to this person.

The individual said, "*So I was thrown in to a battle that continued for most of my life until God allowed me a direct confrontation with Satan. There I literally shouted at him that he could not have me as I was God's child. Since that time life has been somewhat less eventful and certainly more peaceful.*"

Back to Mark 1.

"*You are the Holy One of God.*" says the unclean spirit.

True enough!

Jesus comes directly from God.

Jesus' power comes from God.

Speaking this title was a desperate last try of the demons. It was commonly understood in Jesus' day that you could gain control over a demon by speaking the exact and correct name of that demon.

The demon tries to pull that stunt on Jesus.

But it doesn't work.

No demon can render Jesus powerless.

In verse 15 Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God has come near.

And soon after that he tackles imposter demon forces that make illegitimate claims on the domain of the King of all Creation by invading one of his creatures.

Jesus shakes things up in the ***spirit world***, and in the life of an ***individual***.

It's not the last place he'll work, either.

Jesus, besides working in the personal lives of individuals, also brings his authority to bear on ***social gatherings and culture***.

We see that here, too, as the gathered synagogue is uneasy and restless.

We see later in Mark that when he welcomes tax collectors, and has lunch with prostitutes.

And besides the social scene, Jesus shakes things up in the ***religious world***.

No more same-old, same-old.

Just ask the Pharisees.

And beyond the social and religious circles, Jesus stirs things up on the ***national stage***.

He challenges the status quo of government and power and authority.

Just ask the Sadducees and Herodians.

They want him liquidated.

And beyond that - well, even Pilate is left uncomfortable.

Jesus' authority is felt all the way to the ***international level***.

And those encounters of Jesus may involve direct encounters with dark powers from the spirit world that seek to subvert and poison and damage God's good creation on all these levels:

personal

social

religious

national

international

They may involve encounters with human powers that have been only indirectly affected by dark forces, that have quietly or even unknowingly formed alliances with dark forces against the values and love and power of God.

They may involve encounters with social structures that are not directly connected with the spirit world, but that move in the same direction as unclean spirits, that is - in ways that are NOT God-honoring, NOT in submission to the King of Creation.

The early church fathers used to say that we face three enemies:

- the world
- the flesh
- the devil

Don't attribute everything that goes wrong to only one of these.

It sometimes take great discernment, even prophetic insight to understand what comes from which source.

In whatever case, let's always be aware that:

"God acts in human history to make all things new. The Incarnation is a divine rescue mission from evil, death, and the powers and principalities that corrupt God's good creation." [N.T. Wright in a lecture at Calvin Seminary]

Jesus came to take the lead in that rescue mission on all the levels we mentioned -

- personal
- social
- religious
- national
- international

And we as his followers, apprentices who walk in his footsteps, are called to follow.

We're not in the business of making people comfortable, and complacent.

We're in the Jesus business of rattling the doors of hell itself, and declaring the authority of our Lord! And we're here to carry that authority into every corner of Creation.

Recall the basic concept that is at the heart of this entire summer series:

As Jesus is to the Church, so the Church is to the World.

We carry the authority of Jesus into the world.

Any authority that we carry is only secondary, and it is authority and power that comes only through the person of Jesus Christ.

The authority of the Body of Christ on earth today is found not in well-crafted liturgies, or in aesthetically pleasing buildings.

Authority of believers is not found through a well-managed and effectively staffed church organization with great governance policies.

Authority isn't found in how well-connected believers are socially, or how academically advanced the average education level of the community is.

Authority has absolutely nothing to do with the average income level.

Authority is found, our call to action, our confidence to serve comes through our surrender to Jesus Christ.

It is surrender that needs to happen on a personal level.

It is surrender that needs to be constant on a communal level.

Jesus is our link to the active power of Heaven.

He is our only link.

He is our all-sufficient link.

No more.

No less.

No other.

In our Jesus-following lives, we go with confidence.

When we encounter evil, doing so without fear.
For no force of evil, be it of the world, the flesh or even the devil himself -
no force of evil will have the last word over our lives.

That Last Word belongs to Jesus.
We can stand confident in His authority and minister, trusting that he will flow his power as he chooses and
bring results that are in keeping with his will.