

Epiphany 4  
“Astonished, amazed, but believing?” (Mark 1:21-28)  
January 28, 2024  
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 4th Sunday after Epiphany is from our Gospel reading, Mark 1:21-28.

**“21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” 26 And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” 28 And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.”**

So far the text...

Last week we heard about the calling of the disciples to follow Jesus for He would make them fishers of men. The Epiphany season is all about fishing, fishing for the souls of sinners by the revealing of who Jesus is...the Son of God. Wise men from the East...Andrew, Peter, James and John...Jesus did that through His miracles and authoritative teaching. He did it through His exercising of power over the devil and the demons. And when it comes to this type of fishing, Jesus shows that He is a “catch and release” type Fisherman.

Jesus catches repentant sinners with His love and forgiveness and then releases them to go and catch other lost sinners. This is astonishing. It’s amazing how Jesus changes our sinful rebellious hearts to follow Him and witness of His mercy for the whole world...how He makes you and I fishers of men!

And this is our message that we know from John 3:17:

**“17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

So, we heard last week that Jesus began His Galilean ministry preaching to the people these words: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”**

What is the Gospel? It is the very good news that Jesus, the Savior, Jesus, the Holy One of God, came to save the most unholy world by the giving of His life on the cross. By His death and resurrection, He paid for the sins of the whole world! Where in the Gospel does Jesus condemn the world? Destroy the world? There is no fear in the Gospel - only comfort!

And when Jesus began His Galilean ministry, He first went to His hometown of Nazareth with this Gospel as we know from Luke 4. He went to the synagogue and read these words from the prophet Isaiah.

**““The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”**

**20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

Healing to the brokenhearted, broken and ashamed by sin, but repentant! Liberty to those in Satan’s captivity because of sin! Spiritual sight to those who blinded by the devil and cannot see Jesus is the Messiah! Does any of this good news sound like Jesus came to condemn or destroy? No! Jesus closed the scroll and said that it’s fulfilled in the very hearing by the people in that Nazareth synagogue. And yet, what was their reaction? Belief in Jesus as their Savior? No! All eyes were fixed on Him and though they marveled, they didn’t believe in Him. Though Jesus cast His net of love to them, they rejected Him and would not be caught by the Gospel. In fact, Luke 4 tells us this:

**“28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him**

**to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.”**

Unbelief. But that didn't stop Jesus from fishing, did it? He next went to the synagogue in Capernaum which is our Gospel reading. And there Jesus met opposition again - from a demon. The person who was demon possessed had no problems hearing what was being taught in the synagogue by the scribes. Why? Because it was all man-made precepts and had no authority. This demon was fine with everyone being led astray by man's imagination of works righteousness. But God isn't.

As we heard in our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy 18:

**“20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”**

So, the people were used to hearing man-made platitudes self-glorification until all of a sudden Jesus spoke. For He was the Prophet prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:  
**“18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”**

Jesus spoke with an authority not heard of for He spoke from His heart, the heart of God. And this astonished the people! What kind of new teaching is this? They asked. For the Gospel is a new song of God's gift of righteousness and love through Jesus!

But Jesus teaching was not a beautiful song to the ears of the demon possessed man.

**“He cried out, 24 saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”**

Who are the “us”? There was only one demon. This demon presumed to speak for everyone and tried to convince everyone that Jesus was not a healer or the Savior,

but the destroyer. He wanted everyone to dismiss Jesus as a fraud. But Jesus would have none of it. Jesus silenced him and commanded the demon to come out of the man. And the demon had to obey.

Jesus conquered the devil with His almighty Word and He does the same to the demons that continued to thwart Him. Astonishment, amazement was the reaction of the people, but did they believe? His fame spread, but was there belief?

Jesus continued to preach, heal, and drive out demons and what was the people's reaction later in Mark 4?

**“21 But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.”22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.”23 So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”**

Jesus fished and fished but many people rejected Him. Which led Jesus to say, **“28 “Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29 but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”— 30 because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”** - the unpardonable sin – rejection of the Holy Spirit who alone makes our unclean spirits clean!

So, what astonishes the world? What astonishes and amazes you? People flock to South Padre to watch a launch from Space X and are amazed at the sound and the power that shakes the earth, until it makes a big explosion in the sky... People are amazed at the possibilities of artificial intelligence until they are used to shame a singer like Taylor Swift. Electric cars? Cool, until they get too cold and end up leaving people stranded. Yes, the achievements that God gives man are sometimes amazing, but always are fallible and short lived. And man's greatest efforts can never ever heal man's mortal body, much less his sinful soul. Only God can do that!

Only the Holy One can do that! Jesus Christ, God in the flesh! And our cry from our sinful repentant hearts is not that Jesus would “let us alone”. No! For alone, on our own we are lost forever. We humbly ask Jesus the world’s Savior to daily come to each of us with His forgiving, comforting and authoritative Word of the redeeming Gospel! Feed us with His body and blood for the remission of our sins!

What alone gives true astonishment and amazement? – the Good News of Jesus Christ who sends His Spirit of truth into our hearts and creates faith to believe and profess: “Yes, you are the Holy One, the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

So, Peter confessed in John 6 and so do you, believer in Jesus:  
**“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”**

“Ein Prosit der Gemütlichkeit” That’s the German toast that we said in the Polkafest yesterday. It’s traditional to raise a stein and toast to your health...to your well-being. For the Christian, we not only give thanks for all the gifts that God gives to our body, our health, but even more we pray that God would give well-being to our soul.

So we heard these words from Psalm 63 yesterday to begin the Polkafest:

**“1 You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land where there is no water.  
2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.  
3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.  
4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.  
5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.**

Jesus, the Bread of life, satisfies us with the richest of food for our souls – complete forgiveness and righteousness! Eternal life! Jesus quenches our parched souls with His water of life so that we would never thirst again! And we are astonished and amazed that He has done this for me and you poor sinners. And we believe! Amen.

**“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**