

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany  
January 31, 2021

“The insipid, lifeless teaching of man vs. the astonishing, life-giving, teaching of God” (Mark 1:22)

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LSB 396

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, is from our reading from Mark 1:22.

**“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”**

Here ends our text.

Has a child shared a recent new happening with you? Maybe a new tooth is coming in and the old one is wiggling its way out? Maybe a child is amazed at reading a sentence for the first time and wants you to hear? How about the wonderment of jumping up and grabbing a monkey bar that couldn’t be reached before, but now with the growing an inch it made all the difference.? Playing a song on the piano for the first time? Life is full of little new wonderments that often take us by surprise.

For the people in the synagogue in Capernaum, their eyes were filled with childlike astonishment at the One who spoke with authority, and with authority drove out demons. This was something new and amazing! Our Gospel reading tells us the reaction of the people. **“What is this? What new doctrine is this?” Mark 1:27**

To understand what this new doctrine was and how it was different from what they had been hearing from the scribes, we take time this morning to compare the old with the new. We compare the old insipid, tired, lifeless man-made teachings with the new awe-inspiring life-giving teachings of Jesus. For us, who know the precious Gospel, His mercies are new every morning and never grow old. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

## I. The lifeless teachings of man

To see how great a treasure the gospel of Jesus is, we first look at the lifeless teachings of men. Unlike Jesus' teaching, the scribes and pharisees filled the air with dull, uninspiring platitudes of works righteousness. Later in chapter 7 of Mark, Jesus described the teaching of the pharisees.

**“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:  
‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.  
7 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’  
8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”**

The people in Galilee noticed right away that Jesus was teaching something very different from the tired, old, moralizing that they heard from the so called “Biblical scholars”. These “church teachers” taught man’s precepts and quoted each other instead of the Word of God.

And later in Matthew 23 we hear Jesus say,

**13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.**

**15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.**

They shut up heaven by making the entrance into heaven all about outward acts of piety. But, again, man can never be saved by his works. Jesus told them that they **“have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matthew 23:23)**

The pharisees did not teach people to follow foreign gods of wood and stone as in the time of Jeremiah, but they had made gods of themselves. What God said through Jeremiah still applied.

**13 “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And, hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13)**

II. The life-giving teaching of Jesus

Now, we hear the new life-giving teachings of Jesus. And they hold water! For Jesus is life giving water that quenches the soul’s thirst. So, Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria.

**“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”  
(John 4:13)**

Never thirst again? Have everlasting life? That’s new! I want some of that water said the woman. And then Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah and her life changed. Just like in our Gospel, she went and told others and Jesus fame spread.

The new, life-giving, astonishing teaching that Jesus spoke was simply this. In Him the prophecies of the Messiah were all fulfilled. The kingdom of God was at hand. Repent and believe.

Right before Jesus came to Capernaum, He started at His hometown of Nazareth and spoke these very words in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

**“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.”  
(Luke 4:18-21)**

The teaching of Jesus was that there is liberty from the captivity of sin through Jesus. Unfortunately, the people in Nazareth rejected Him and took up stones to throw at Him. But in Capernaum, the people received Jesus' new teaching.

Anointed with the Holy Spirit without limit, Jesus spoke with authority to hurting people. His same word speaks with authority to each of us this morning. We heard from Psalm 32 in our introit that **“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround Him.”**

Jesus covers you with His mercy through His word and sacraments. 2021 is the acceptable year of the Lord for us. For Jesus has paid for the release of our captivity by His death on the cross and gives to us poor sinners the riches of His grace! Through our baptisms we are united with Christ death and resurrection. And we receive Jesus' very body and blood this morning for our complete forgiveness. So, Psalm 32 says to our hearts as well, **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”**

Is that not awe-inspiring how Jesus frees you anew with the Gospel?

For the people in Capernaum it was as well. Our reading tells us that **“immediately Jesus' fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee”.** (Mark 1:28)

There was great joy among the people, just like when Jesus revealed Himself to Andrew as the Messiah. With great joy, he quickly found his brother Peter and told him that they had found the Messiah. (John 1:41) Wherever Jesus went teaching and healing, the people were amazed.

Mark's Gospel, that we are following now in this year's series B lectionary, especially catches our attention at how fast paced it is. Mark tells the world that there is an exciting new message! To anyone who has not heard the Gospel of salvation it is absolutely brand new and shiny! Mark shifts gears quickly so you better hang on tight! He does this to emphasize the urgency of revealing the Gospel to the world.

In just the first chapter of Mark, we hear of Jesus' baptism, His temptation, His calling of His first disciples, His first ministry preaching in Galilee, and then Capernaum where today's Gospel reading takes place. Go and count how many times Mark uses the word “immediately” in the first chapter alone. 11 times!

Here are some examples: At Jesus' baptism - "**immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.**" V. 10 Then, after His baptism, "**Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness**" v. 12 to be tempted. "**The disciples immediately left their nets and followed Him**". V. 18. As soon as Jesus gets to Capernaum, "**immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.**" V. 21.

And we'll hear next week that when Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and the leper, they were cured **immediately**. v.31, 42. Fifty times Mark uses the word "immediately" in his gospel compared to half that in Matthew and Luke.

Men in all of history presume to be authoritative. They invent new "gospels" to prop themselves up and take power over people. Today is no different. Modern day moralizing consists of being called shameful if you don't think your tax dollars should go to fund abortions in other countries. You are considered hateful and non-inclusive if you don't follow the world's gospel of condoning homosexuality and transgenderism. You need to be reprogrammed say those in authority. The most inspiring thing that men must do is combat climate change and save the earth.

Well, man's "gospel" cannot save the earth or give eternal life. He comes to the conclusion that he can't even stop the trajectory of the Covid crisis after prattling on and on about what needs to be changed. But, Jesus' Gospel promises to restore the earth for His people that He has restored by faith. He will make it new again.

The demon in our text knew of Jesus power and feared Him. "You've come to destroy us". Yes, the demons will be destroyed hell forever, but all who repent, will not be destroyed. Jesus came to save and not destroy. He allowed His body, the temple, to be destroyed in order to give life to the world. That's awe-inspiring!

So, we sang in our hymn of the day "Arise and Shine in Splendor" in verse 4. "Lift up your eyes in wonder – See, nations gather yonder. From sin to be set free. The world has heard Your story; Her sons come to Your glory; her daughters haste Your light to see."

The Gospel causes child-like wonder and amazement at Jesus' story. It's your story by faith. It's your new story to rejoice in and share, that you have seen the Morning Star. Amazing, astonishing, life-giving. Amen

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