

Mark 1:21-28

Epiphany 4; January 31, 2021

"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.... It is a period of Civil War. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory..... Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy...."

Remember those words that appeared in the opening scene of the first Star Wars movie. I can remember watching those words appear on the big screen as the movie premiered in 1977. As those words ended, there was the opening scene of the rebel ship trying to escape the empire's large ship.... In 1977, the special effects in the movie were right there on the cutting edge. As a high school kid, I couldn't take eyes off of that movie. You walked out of the theater just totally amazed. However, compared to the effects of today, they really look pretty cheesy, don't they? Not really amazing at all.

When Jesus stepped into the synagogue as a guest preacher in Capernaum, he didn't look all that amazing, did he? Here was a 30 year old man, who had just started to preach and teach. He had been baptized, he had defeated the devil in the wilderness, called a few disciples and changed water into wine. He had not done or said many of the things for which he will later be known. He had not preached the Sermon on the Mount and had not yet put the Pharisees in their place; He had not stilled a storm or healed any lepers or raised anyone from the dead. As a result, Jesus was still an unknown teacher. People had not yet formed an opinion of Him. They had not yet made up their minds about Jesus.

But that was all about to change. As they arrived at the synagogue that Sabbath Saturday, they just expected another sermon, some songs to be sung and a few prayers, and they would then go back home. It probably felt as if it was just another Sabbath day. Nothing extraordinary here, some might have thought. But then Jesus showed up. It was all about to change.

Mark writes: **"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."** It doesn't take long before the people are amazed. Why? Mark doesn't even record what Jesus said. Mark doesn't even give us the topic about which Jesus spoke that day. Mark does tell us how the people reacted. There was something different about Jesus. Every other rabbi who sat in the teacher's chair appealed to other respected rabbis of old to back up his interpretation. Everyone cited their sources, appealed to human authority, and perpetuated the teaching about a god who demands that we climb the ladder to attain his righteousness rather than the God who comes to us to save us. Jesus did not need to do that. Instead he teaches the Scriptures as if he is the original writer.

In our first lesson today, the people were pleading with Moses for God to communicate with his people in some other way than making the mountains shake and the earth tremble, complete with fire and billowing smoke. **"Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."** God listened to his people and promised: **"What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him."** This prophet, this Savior would come not to destroy but to save. That was the message that Jesus would bring to people. Jesus comes to proclaim release to the prisoners, forgiveness to the sinners, and light and life to those in the shadow of death. This is good news! The Son of God takes on our humanity so that he can make us right with God.

But not everyone wanted to hear that message. **"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "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!"** The Devil was true to form. As Jesus proclaimed Good News, Satan was there to raise his ugly head. Jesus was not going to let that happen. **"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!"** The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." There that day in the synagogue the people saw two different voices. They saw Jesus speak with authority. They saw the Devil simply making noise.

The Devil showed up that day in the synagogue to drive people away from God. Jesus showed up that day to draw people to God. How do we know? That's what the Devil does. Every day of our life Satan does battle with us. He is like that roaring lion looking for someone to devour. He hates that we follow the truth. He wants to create disorder and dysfunction in our lives. He wants to hold on to us. But Jesus wants to release us. He came to set the captives free. He busts open the prison of guilt, and fills it with his forgiveness. Jesus speaks to us that same word he spoke in the synagogue that day: **"Be Quiet! Come out!"** All Satan can do is to listen.

Isn't that the reason that you are here today? You came here to confess your sins. You came here to hear that those sins are forgiven. You come here to have your sins washed away through the water of Baptism. You come here to receive Jesus' body and blood to assure you that your sins are forgiven.

When Jesus showed up that day in the synagogue he didn't look like much. He looked like just another ordinary man who may have known how to teach. He may not have looked like much when he would hang from a cross three years later. He may not have looked like much when his dead body would be taken off the cross. Then everything would change. He would rise from the dead. His words would change the lives of people forever. He would return to his Father's home to rule over all things for his believers. This same Jesus who didn't look like much when he came the first time to heaven will return in his full glory. Jesus' death and resurrection means that he won and the Devil lost. Do you want to be amazed? Then look to Jesus and marvel at all he has done for you. Amen.