

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany - January 29, 2012
Hymn of the Day: "Son of God, Eternal Savior" LSB 842
Text: Mark 1:21-28

Be Silent!

Jesus' teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum brings marvel and wonder to His hearers there. "[T]hey were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." Jesus' message was *not* new - it was the age-old message of salvation, preached before through the prophets and messengers of God. So, this remark on the contrast between Jesus and the scribes is more indicative of how the true preaching of God's Word had gone astray.

When Jesus opened His mouth, all those useless words from the scribes' mouths went away. The congregation heard the message of His holy kingdom free from the presence of sin. **"And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God."**

The Devil's scheme is always to turn people against Christ. No one will devote themselves to Jesus if they think He is their enemy, rather than the very champion and friend of sinners in need of mercy. The unclean spirit even comes across as pious: **"I know who you are—the Holy One of God."** It rings of praise, but it's really devilish distraction. St. Paul tells us that the devil disguises himself as an angel of light and masks his workers as servants of righteousness. They can be wolves in sheep's clothing, complete with counterfeit signs and wonders that look so much like the real thing. Mark these words of Paul, and mark these words of the unclean spirit. There are many teachers even today whose words seem pious, but which do nothing but bring doubt and destruction to their hearers.

Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. Not all pious-sounding talk comes from God. Jesus certainly is the "Holy One of God," but not in the way the demons proclaimed Him. **"Have you come to destroy us?"** is the question intended to plant a seed of doubt. Who is the "us" here? I would submit that the unclean spirit's words aim to portray Jesus as the enemy of sinners - as *our* enemy.

When we remember that the Devil is trying to separate Christ and all people, it becomes more likely that the unclean spirit is referring to himself *and* the people gathered there. It's as if the unclean spirit says, "Have you come to destroy me and

these people who do what is sinful, who therefore are of the devil? They've rebelliously thrown their lots in with Satan. O Holy One of God, You know the unholy cannot come in contact with the Holy without being destroyed. You cannot do anything but destroy all of us, then!"

"Have you come to destroy us?" Can anything be more diabolical than to picture Jesus as the destroyer of mankind? How opposite from the Truth of God's Word! Jesus came not to destroy us, though we deserve it. **"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

Granted, the Devil often has to do very little work; we're good at doing his work for him. We fail the Lord on our own. We let our devotion to the Lord be disrupted. God's truth falls upon our deaf ears. We think nothing of letting our minds wander while the Scriptures are read, but we stay focused when the latest gossip comes up in conversation or TV. We foolishly think Jesus dying on the Cross is boring because we heard it before. Our ears and minds itch and crave, always wanting something new and different.

Yet God loves us. He sent His only begotten Son for us. He doesn't suffer the Devil to have his way with you. The Lord intervenes, rescues you, and shields you. Jesus Christ went through death to prepare a place for you in Heaven. Yet if you reject Him and stay His enemy, you will not go to that blissful place. On the Last Day, Christ does in fact return as judge - that is when it's not good to be his enemy.

But right now is not the Day; now is the time of God's favor. Now is the time where Jesus, the friend of sinners, is here for you. He comes not in condemnation, but in forgiveness. So you are safe, dear repentant sinners. Christ is your shield. The Lord is the shade at your right hand, guarding you from the wrath of God which you, in sin, rightly deserve to face. God's Son came not to condemn the world, but to save you by being condemned Himself for the sin of the whole world.

Who can count the number of times the Lord has protected us from Satan's traps? When a terrible army of evil has charged against us, the Lord has been a wall of fire around us. In the middle of the night, the Good Shepherd does not slumber. He watches over you for the darkness is not dark to the Lord. We pray that the Lord would let His "holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me" because He promises to do this for us forever and ever.

Since we have flesh and blood, the Son of God "shared in our humanity so **“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”** (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus fought and won for us. Now He fights and wins *in* us so that His strength may be made perfect in our weakness. His Word is a light for our path, directing our feet to flee from the Devil's broad path that leads to destruction.

Don't let all the demonic unrest in the world (marriages destroyed; children hated, despised, and considered a burden; rampant conflict; false gods) make mischief in our churches or even in your own heads. Satan's lies contain just enough truth to tempt us to believe them. We alternate between taking Satan too lightly and too seriously. The Deceiver will convince you this or that sin is really nothing, so that later he can reveal to you that in fact it's deadly serious. The weight of guilt rests upon your soul and can drive you to despair.

“Be silent.” This is the Word of the Lord to Satan. “Be silent and leave my people be.” It's Jesus' word to you, too. Be silent and listen: “Sinner, I forgive you all your sins.” Your sins are not greater than the mercy found in the death of Christ. Be silent so that you can hear: **“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**

Hear again that Jesus didn't destroy the man with the demon, but saved him. **“But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.”**

The Lord, whose commanding words even the unclean spirits must obey, uses the power of His Word not just in Capernaum on that Sabbath, but also here today. What happened there happens here. God's people are gathered to hear, learn, sing, and pray the Word of God. All the while Jesus stands in our midst teaching with His authority. With His authority, He removes our sin without destroying us.

Jesus sternly tells your enemies - the devil, your sinful old nature - to **“Be silent!”** His Word stops the mouths of our sin, death, and the devil. This is the Word of God that transforms simple water into a blessed Baptismal rebirth in Christ to destroy Satan's power in the heart of another child of God. This is the Word that works faith inside you so that you run to the Lord rather than run from Him. By His Word your sins are forgiven, and you are declared to be saints in

Christ. By His Word He will raise all the dead from their graves and give eternal life to you and all believers.

“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.” The demons cannot harm you. Even they *must* obey the Lord. Let us be amazed along with all those people of Capernaum that day. Jesus is not present to destroy us, but rather to help us, feed us, and forgive us. Amen.

- Pastor Michael Schuermann
S.D.G.