JESUS SPEAKS A POWERFUL WORD

1. With divine authority
2. With amazing results

What do you come to church to hear? What is it that you expect to hear from the mouth of your pastor on Sunday morning? How would you feel if I climbed up in the pulpit and began sharing with you my tips for successful investing and retirement planning? What if I declared: I have invented a new 10-step program for greater spirituality? Or maybe we could have a debate or discussion. We could argue over whether common cup or individual cup communion was better. Or maybe we would debate whether white robes or black robes were better. How would you feel if that is what you heard in church? While it might be entertaining for a while, I am guessing that if this went on week after week, you would go home from church feeling pretty empty and unsatisfied.

Maybe that analogy helps you to understand the way the people of Capernaum felt when they heard Jesus preach to them for the first time. When the people of Jesus' day went to church, they had gotten used to bringing a bit of skepticism with them into the building. Their teachers in those days were known as the scribes or teachers of the law. These scribes talked about God's Word, it's true - or maybe we should say they argued about it. Instead of sharing with the people the plain truths of God's Word, they argued over trivial details. How could you tell exactly what second the Sabbath Day began and ended? What types of spices were you required to tithe? When all the people heard was law and hairsplitting details of the law at that. No wonder they went home feeling empty.

But then one Sabbath Day, Jesus himself, at that time an unknown 30-year old from Nazareth, came into the synagogue at Capernaum, and he began to teach. And from the moment he opened his mouth, his hearers realized that this man, this teacher, was not like all their other teachers. He was different. We are told: The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus' word had authority. The words he spoke cut people straight to the heart, convicting and convincing them that the things he spoke were eternally true, personally true. The voice of Jesus was the voice of God echoing in the walls of their little Galilean synagogue. He talked about sin - not just sin in general, but their sin with which they had offended and angered God. He talked about salvation – not just an abstract idea, but their salvation - God's plan to rescue them from darkness, giving them hope, that in spite of their sin, they could enjoy God's presence forever in his kingdom of light.

I wish I could have sat there and listened to Jesus' sermon that day in Capernaum. Maybe you do too. Wouldn't it be great if you could tune your car radio to sermons of Jesus over the airwaves, instead of the latest radio preacher? Wouldn't it be great if we could have Jesus' Word with us, anytime, anywhere we needed it?

Wait a minute. That is not just an idle wish. We do have access to the voice of Jesus, speaking clearly to us in his Word of the Bible. He still speaks with the same powerful Word today. We are blessed to be a part of a church that regards every Word of the Bible as God's inspired Word, still true and relevant to us today. What a shame it would be if, after we proudly say that the Bible is a unique book among all the books in the world, we did not take the opportunity to read it for ourselves! Take advantage of the
opportunity you have to hear your Savior speak - with the same astonishing authority that he showed the people of Capernaum.

And the message of Jesus has not changed either. He still speaks the same messages of sin and salvation - messages which will never get old, not so long as you are still a sinner in need of God's forgiveness. God kept the promise he made to Moses long ago, as you heard it in our first lesson: I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth. God kept that promise when his own Son took on human flesh to bring God's message of salvation personally to the world. Jesus is that Great Prophet - a prophet who brings a powerful Word because he speaks with God's own authority as his one and only Son.

Sometimes it seems that everybody has a slant. Sometimes it seems like everyone has an ulterior motive for the things that they say. When it comes to the life and death issues, and all the other issues that you face in your life, whose word can you trust? Trust Jesus. Listen to his powerful Word - because his Word to you is the one voice that will never lead you astray.

But not everyone in the synagogue that day appreciated Jesus bringing the light and truth of salvation to the hearts of his listeners. We are told: A man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil 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!

You would not really expect to find a demon-possessed man sitting in God's house on the Sabbath Day. Maybe the man's friends had brought him there in hopes of helping or curing him. But it is clear that the evil spirit afflicting this man was not fooled by Jesus' ordinary outward appearance. He knew that this man was the holy Son of God, who had indeed come to destroy the devil's work.

But this evil spirit was not doing Jesus any favors with his outburst: You are the holy one of God! Jesus did not need, or want, the testimony of evil spirits to convince people that he was God's Son. And so he addressed the spirit directly and forcefully: Be quiet! Come out of him! And with a final scream of rage, the spirit was gone. Because Jesus' powerful Word has divine authority, it also brings amazing results in the lives of people.

The words of Jesus are strong enough, today just as 2000 years ago, to overcome the words and works of Satan. That day in Capernaum, it was a very real and very vocal demon possession. It is less likely, and I pray that it always will be, that you and I will have to deal with that particular manifestation of Satan's power. But make no mistake about it, you and I deal on a daily basis with the devil's influence in other, less obvious ways. Aren't there people today whose lives demonstrate that they are firmly controlled by Satan? Isn't it still his whispering voice that we too often follow, telling us to indulge ourselves at our neighbor's expense, telling God to take a backseat while we satisfy our own cravings?

Satan is still hard at work in our world. And Jesus' powerful Word is still the one thing that drives him away. When Satan accuses us of guilt, when he accuses God of being unfair and unloving, Jesus' word gives us an answer: The blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from every sin - This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When Satan tempts us to leave God's paths behind for riches or pleasure, Jesus is there to warn us: What can a man give in exchange for his soul? But then he encourages us: Christ's love compels us.
We do not live for ourselves, but for him who died for us and was raised again. And he guides us in thankful living, not based on Pharasaic hairsplitting, but on genuine Christian love: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

A man on a camping trip left his family at their campsite and went hiking alone in the woods. During the hike he unexpectedly fell and badly gashed his leg. Limping badly and bleeding considerably, he struggled back along the trail until he reached the campground where his family was waiting for him. Shocked to see her husband's condition, the man's wife was even more surprised to discover that the man had not even opened the fully stocked first-aid kit in his backpack. Why didn't you put a bandage on? she demanded. Well, the man replied, that's only for emergencies.

That is a pretty ridiculous story. What is even more ridiculous is for us, who struggle with all sorts of mental and social and spiritual hardships, choose to limp along without using the powerful Word of God. God does not tell us that his Word is for emergencies only. He gave us his Word so that it would be heard and used! We do not preach an empty Gospel. We bring the Word of Jesus that has the power to change lives. Let's not be afraid to use it!

Long ago the people of Israel begged God not to speak to them from the fiery Mt Sinai. So God promised to send them a prophet whose voice they could hear and believe. He sent his Son to tell us the truth only God could reveal - about sin and forgiveness through the cross. Jesus speaks a powerful Word. Come and listen to him! Amen.

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