

"The Good News"
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Mark 1:21-28

"Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are ***pondered*** by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate." (Psalm 111:1-4 NRSV)

This morning, I'd like to ponder the works of God that we see in Jesus as He begins his public ministry in Capernaum. Jesus has just called his first disciples, and he went to Capernaum. What happens when Jesus comes to town?

If you were to read that Jesus came to North Bay, what would you expect his visit to be like?

It was the Sabbath, for Jesus that meant Saturday, for us it means Sunday. So Jesus came to town on the Sabbath, he entered the Synagogue and taught.

That part goes as I would expect, but it seems that everything after is unexpected... at least to the crowds. Instantly, immediately, the crowds recognize that there is a difference in Jesus' preaching and teaching. It is described as a teaching unlike the scribes, and with authority.

There is no doubt that the Scribes knew their material and were good teachers. They were the experts and knew all about the law. But Jesus is the author and source of the law and the prophets. He was the fulfillment of all that was hoped for by Israel. He is the fulfillment of the law.

He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. At his baptism the Holy Spirit descended in and upon him. His teaching was with authority. When Jesus called his disciples, Simon and Andrew, James and John, Jesus spoke and immediately they followed Him.

If you're hearing echoes of Genesis – God said, "let there be light and there was light", you are correct.

Jesus taught in the Synagogue and immediately the people there heard a difference, a power, an authority that they are not used to hearing. They were astounded. Consider deeply this man Jesus, that when he spoke, everyone in the room heard something new; the living Word spoken with authority.

Just then, there was a man with an unclean spirit in the Synagogue. The crowd, first astounded at Jesus' teaching, was now upset, a man with an unclean spirit, in the synagogue. What does Jesus do when confronted with evil?

Powers vie for control over our world – principalities and powers contend for influence and domination. We know the real presence of evil that destroys lives, destroys our city, evil that is greater than any one person, evil that causes poverty, pain, suffering, brokenness in homes and families.

We look out our doors and see pollution, homelessness, we hear the cries of people hurting and hurtful, we know of crimes here and in every place. We have seen the terrifying consequences and inhumane regimes in our world when evil forces are unleashed.

In Jesus' world, as in many parts of the world today, people's lives were blighted by forces or powers beyond their control, forces that seemed to take them over. People today say, 'I don't know what made me do it.'

People in Jesus' day reckoned they did know why, there were hostile evil forces out there, hard to define, but powerful in their effect. Calling such a force a "demon" or "unclean spirit" was their of saying that the person was

overpowered by an outside force. (N.T Wright) We hear or read the news of what is happening in our community, our country our world.

What does Jesus have to do with all of this?

What do you imagine would have happened to a man in the Synagogue possessed by an unclean spirit, ***when Jesus was not*** present?

I expect the rulers of the Synagogue would have thrown him out. And probably he would have been excommunicated, been cut off from his friends and family, and worship, until he was free of this evil spirit.

The evil spirit cried out; 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?' 'Have you come to destroy us?' Jesus, what have you to do with us?

Study what happens next. Jesus speaks words of authority, He commands the unclean spirit: "Be silent, and come out of him!" The unclean spirit obeys. It convulses the man, makes him cry out, like it is trying to destroy him. But in the end, the unclean spirit is gone, the man is set ***free, he is redeemed, made whole.***

Jesus has authority. Jesus is ***the*** authority.

Paul describes Jesus as; "the head over every power and authority." (Col 2:9) Jesus said of himself; "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Jesus uses that authority to heal, to drive out evil that destroys us and to usher in His Father's kingdom. Jesus didn't just speak about the Kingdom of God; it was lived in His actions. He made the kingdom of God visible not by destroying, but by healing.

Have you ever prayed for a miracle?

When I read about the man set free from the evil spirit, I tend to think that Jesus healed the man and then he lived happily ever after. But that isn't the case. Being healed or set free by Jesus is the beginning of the story not the end. With evil driven out of the man, God's rule is made way for.

The man is given a clean sweep, but then it is his choice what to fill his life with; to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to set his feet on following Jesus, or not.

I don't know what miracles you are praying for today, but I do know that whatever it is Jesus has the authority to accomplish His plans for us and for our world. I also know that whether our prayers are answered according to ***our will*** or not God's will ***is*** for our healing, our wholeness, to be set free from the evil that binds us, but that is only the beginning of the story.

God's plan is for his kingdom to come in all its fullness in every life, in every person, and for God's good will to be done in all the earth as it is heaven. Mark's gospel wants us to know that Jesus is the power above every power, and the name above every name.

Jesus insists on being in charge of all things - until all things in our lives, until all things in the church, and all things in heaven and on earth reflect the His Father's good will.

***Hallelujah! I give thanks to God with everything I've got—
Wherever good people gather, and in the congregation.
God's works are so great, worth
A lifetime of study—endless enjoyment!
Splendor and beauty mark his craft;
His generosity never gives out.
His miracles are his memorial—
This God of Grace, this God of Love.***

(Psalm 111:1-4 The Message)

Prayer: God of grace, we see the truth that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, and he uses that authority to bring healing and life, to set us free from all the evil that binds us. Today we ponder anew your works of love that are so great, and your power to bring healing and life. Amen.