

## The Fourth Sunday after The Epiphany (2018)

**Mark 1:21–28** And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching.

**And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.**

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.” 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. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

In the Name of Jesus.

‘Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered!’

My dear ones:

The way the LORD figures, He is BLESSING all men by His arrival, the arrival of the Kingdom of God. It's just from the devil's way of figuring—and our old Adam, on the devil's leash, Lord have mercy!—from the viewpoint of wickedness, the Lord Jesus is DESTROYING us: ROBBING us of and WIPING AWAY E...V...E...R...Y...T...H...I...N...G in which we are accustomed to look for happiness: sin and hypocrisy!

The devil's two empty promises are that mangling God's will is improving on it; and that when THAT proves false, there's any number of ways to un-ring the bell, to convince ourselves, God, others, that WE have not cracked what was just fine to begin with.

How's that working OUT for us, my dear ones?

So—TO...BLESS...US!—The Holy One of God silenced the unclean spirit and evicted it. Hallelujah!

The Gospel sez:

The unseen powers of corruption are ONE THING!  
But through the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth; and now  
by His Ascension with the wounds of Calvary still on Him,  
you and I—dearly beloved—and every last man we meet:  
we are NO LONGER identified with what USED TO hold  
us enthralled; our directions from our Director below:

SIN...then PRETEND!

Then REPEAT! And there's NO...WAY...OFF that  
hamster wheel!

The Only Son from heaven foretold by ancient seers  
By God the Father given, In human form appears.  
No sphere His light confining, No star so brightly shining  
As He, our Morning Star.

O time of God appointed, O bright and holy morn!  
He comes, the king anointed, The Christ the virgin-born,  
Grim death to vanquish for us, To open heav'n before us  
And bring us life again!

CONFIRMATION again, my friends, that your poor pastor is NOT falling back into his sarcastic rut when he says about himself that I...know...God...least...of...all!

Because I wondered this week: why, then the Lord BEGINS His demon-casting-out-work; why does He head FIRST for the Church? For the synagogue? For the ONLY building in town where men might have ANY HOPE of hearing the straight deal about them and their God?

See?! How little I know the Law OR the Gospel? Like all other men, my go-to, my default thinking is that ANY gathering, ANY building, ANY hubbub that WE cobble together, somehow GUARANTEES the presence of the Holy One! Like the magicians and silly sods who imagine they can draw on the ground or sing and dance and SUMMON some sort of great power.

What better place to START, dear Christians, than with the people of God?! Those who by their very GATHERING and reading of Moses and opening their ears and praying—and do NOT deny that they were sincere!—

You find sick people at the hospital and dead people at the cemetery and thieves at the bank. Where do you find

those MOST hassled and harried between holiness and what's unclean? Where they pray they can be helped!

And boy, does Jesus help! Not ONLY does He cast out our watchdog, the unclean spirit, barking and warning us that we're about to be emptied OUT! But His preaching has a finality—that's the Gospel!—that the rabbis, the scribes, the supposed masters of Moses and His Law can never bring.

'A NEW teaching,' the people exclaim! In other words: NOT the Law; but the Gospel! Not Moses; but Someone utterly New!

Whom MOSES promised! God love him! Moses does the best he can, with what the Good Lord gave him! After speaking of one from Israel, like him, who would later come; what does Moses say? It's all he knows: commanding. 'You SHALL listen to Him!'

'All right, dear Moses. Calm down. The Gospel ain't swallowed down like the jagged little pill of the Law. Yes, we SHALL listen to Him! Yikes!'

Just about every one in the room carries a helpful tool for repentance. Almost all our gizmos to which we're psychically attached—if not surgically!—have some sort of recording function on them.

CONSIDER, my friends, turning on the recorder: the next time YOU have a great big load of advice and counsel and direction and Moses-like 'You really SHOULD...' to deliver to the next man. Then review how much Baptism is speaking in you, and how much dry dust of Sinai.

I'm not joking, my friends. I won't make it past LUNCH! And y'all are NOT all THAT MUCH holier than I am!

The zone is FLOODED with 'shall's' and 'shall not's' and little improvements we are CERTAIN that—if the next man simply TRIED—the world...would...be...abetterplace!

If I'm wrong about you, then why do you wag your head so much? And roll the eyes? And smirk?

Saint Paul spoke to those who got wrangling over eating meat once offered at pagan altars. What we tubby priests could not scarf down from all those sacrifices, we sold at a cut rate to the poor. Lots of the first Christians were on the lookout for a bargain. ‘What’s it to me if some poor soul thought he was offering this steak to Zeus? Steak that’s good enough for Zeus won’t turn MY stomach!’

‘Ooooh! But is not that SOMEHOW approving of and advancing paganism? Hmnnn?!’

Things N...E...V...E...R change! It’s an occupational hazard of mine, to GET TO hear from super-duper Christians about ALL the most INNOCUOUS things that are driving us poor Christians to the precipice of unbelief:

Public schools!

Halloween!

Santa!

Mardi Gras fun!

Going to the movies!

It's amazing how MUCH people know about things that are NOTHING.

Praise the Spirit of Jesus that He has brought the NEW to us when He landed at Mary's Boy at His Baptism in the Jordan! And now, we are baptized too, and well pleasing to heaven, WITHOUT THE LAW!

For PAUL does NOT answer Moses with Moses! 'Well, that is YOUR argument for or against this behavior. Now, here's MY argument for or against.'

You see, Saint Paul was MOST happy that he and all Christians are fed from heaven! Eating the Body of Christ, drinking His Blood: two things can be solid at the same time! How NEW!!!!!!!

Yes, Zeus is nothing; but your fellow Christian's weakness is something; and Christ suffered on Calvary for you and your fellows, NOT for false gods or demons or powers of the dark!

FREE people do not chafe at the weight of their chains!

And so whether or not you take advantage of a sale is a nothing; at least it's a FREE-thing!

And if your head spins too much about it all, or you're afraid: you're free to let that all rest too!

We can even enlist MOSES in our NEW business, our NEW life!

Moses said, 'You SHALL listen to Jesus!' Okay, Moses! I will!

And BEFORE, and AFTER, we have advice and counsel and suggestions for the next man, Christian or not!—and

And WHILE we are dishing out our advice and counsel and endless suggestions, let us OBEY Moses, and listen to Christ!

And tell ourselves, the next man, each other:

You BETTER call on God as your own dear heavenly Father! With all the boldness and confidence with which you always prayed to mommy and daddy in every need or hurt or want, when you was small! Even MORE bold, MORE confident!

You are REALLY going to anger God, if you do NOT order Him around today: to keep you from sin; to bless you; to save you even if you don't wanna be saved all that much today!

And, by the way, my friend, you are in REAL trouble with ME! Because I am going to LOVE YOU, I am going to STICK WITH YOU, without fail, despite your missteps, despite not following ALL my wondrous counsel and advice and suggestions—

As surely as you are STUCK with Jesus as your Savior;

As surely as you are STUCK with God your Father, and you CANNOT get out of His tender hands;

As surely as you CANNOT drive the Spirit of Jesus out of you, as long as you have imperfections to be covered;

That's how certainly YOU...are stuck...WITH...ME!

Our old masters cannot remain in such a place, such a church, such a Communion: Holy!

O Lord, our hearts awaken To know and love You more,  
In faith to stand unshaken, In spirit to adore,  
That we, through this world moving, Each glimpse of  
heaven proving,  
May reap its fullness there!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.