

One of the things that you notice about Jesus as you read the Gospels is that his word is very powerful. He can perform miracles just by speaking. One time Jesus was in a boat and there was a frightening storm. But Jesus stands up and talks to the wind and the waves and says, “Quiet. Be still.” And everything was calm! His word has power over nature. Another time there was an army captain whose servant was very ill and the army captain comes to Jesus and says, “You don’t have to come to my house, just say the word and my servant will be healed.” Jesus’ word has power over sickness. So Jesus’ word has power over nature and power over sickness. Today in our Gospel we’ll find out that Jesus’ word also has power over evil spirits. Today we are going to see that Jesus’ authoritative word 1. Drives out Satan and 2. Cleanses us of our uncleanness.

First, the authoritative word of Jesus drives out Satan. Our Gospel begins, **“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:21-22)**. The people were amazed by the remarkable authority with which Jesus spoke. You see the teachers of the law would usually refer back to the authority of other teachers. But Jesus would refer to his own authority. For example, Jesus would say things like, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matt 5:44-45)**. The people were amazed that Jesus spoke with such authority.

Then all of sudden a man who was possessed by an impure spirit began shouting in the synagogue! **“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!’”** A lot of people read the Gospels and they notice, “There’s a lot demon possession in the Gospels. It can happen today, but it seems like there is a whole lot of it in the Gospels. Why is that?” Well, you know how in a war, maybe some of you have fought in wars, if you have I’m deeply thankful for your service. You know how in a war, when the ships first land on the beach there is a lot fighting. I’m thinking for example of the battle of Normandy. When the ships first land on the beach, they are trying to establish a beachhead and the other side is trying desperately to prevent that and so there is a lot fighting” Well, when Jesus feet touched this earth, the kingdom of God was establishing a beachhead and the kingdom of Satan was desperately trying to prevent that and so there was a lot of visible conflict between Jesus and the devil and his forces.

You see when God first created the world. His reign was glorious and uncontested. But then Satan came in the form of a serpent and tempted Adam and Eve to sin and ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin Satan tries to set himself up as the ruler of this world. But when Jesus came, the kingdom of God landed on the beach to take his world back from Satan. Do you remember what Jesus said last week, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.” (Mark 1:15)**. When Jesus came preaching and teaching the kingdom of God landed on the beach and God began a rescue mission to take this world back from the terrible reign of the devil. And so it makes sense that when Jesus landed on the beach, when he first started preaching, there was a lot of visible conflict between Jesus and the devil with his forces.

But the devil and his forces are no match for Jesus. Notice the power that Jesus has over the devil and his forces. **“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.** All Jesus has to do is give a simple command and the evil spirit comes out. That’s how powerful Jesus’ word is.

Now in our part of the world and at our time, we don’t see many cases of demon possession. And that’s a good thing. It’s a blessing from God. But we should also realize that the devil can influence us in more subtle ways.¹ For example, in Ephesians 4:26-27 it says, **“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not**

¹ I owe this insight to WELS pastor James Hein.

give the devil a foothold.” When we are angry with each other, it gives the devil a foothold into our hearts. You see because the kingdom of God has come to you, Jesus has kicked the devil off the throne of your heart and now Jesus reigns in your heart. But the devil is always looking for a foothold so that he can climb his way back onto the throne of your heart. And so he'll use hatred as a foothold, he'll use love of money as foothold. He'll use pride as a foothold. He's like a rock climber trying to get back onto the throne of your heart. So how do cast him down so that he doesn't climb back onto the throne of our heart? Well, how was the evil spirit cast out in the Gospel today? He was cast out *by the word of Jesus*. When Satan tries to climb back on the throne of our hearts, the only thing that will cast him down is Jesus' powerful word. When you come to church and hear Jesus' word and believe it, you are listening to powerful words that cast down Satan. That's why it's so important to come to church as often as you possibly can because Satan is a rock climber and the only thing that will cast him out is Jesus' powerful word.

So the first thing about Jesus' authoritative word is that it drives out Satan. The second thing I want to point out today about Jesus' authoritative word is that it cleanses us of our uncleanness. God originally created all angels good but then a group of angels, led by the devil rebelled against God. And it's interesting to see what the Bible calls this group of evil angels. Sometimes the Bible calls the evil angels “demons.” Here in our passage the evil angels are called “unclean or impure spirits”: **“a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit.”** Now what makes one impure or unclean is sin. These angels sinned and continue to sin and it made them impure or unclean. And the opposite of being sinful is “holy.” Notice what the impure spirit calls Jesus: **“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!”** So in this passage it is the unclean spirits versus the holy Jesus. And the impure spirits know that Jesus has come to destroy them. It's kind of like have ever seen those commercials for bathroom cleaning soaps and the germs are all running scared from the bubbles because the soap has come to destroy them. The unclean spirit are like the germs and the holy Jesus is the soap that has come to destroy them.

But doesn't that create a problem for us? We are unclean. We have sinned. One time Jesus was having a discussion with the teachers of the law about impurity and he said, **“He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person”** (Mark 7:20-22). We are unclean because we have sinned. You see this is what Satan thinks he has on us. Satan could say to Jesus something to the effect of: “Jesus you can drive me out all you want. They're still unclean. And if you're the soap that has come to destroy what's unclean then you're going to have to destroy them too. How are you going to solve that problem Jesus?” How did Jesus solve that problem? He took all of our uncleanness and he put it on himself. The time when Jesus really defeated the devil was on the cross. That's what the devil had on us, that we are unclean. But on the cross Jesus took all our uncleanness on himself. And in exchange Jesus gave us his own holiness so that now when God looks at you he doesn't see your uncleanness he only sees the holiness of Jesus. Did you hear what the second lesson for today called us? **“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1).** The Bible calls us “holy,” without sin, because Jesus has taken our uncleanness on himself and has given us his own holiness in exchange.

And because of his sacrifice on the cross the word of Jesus pronounces us holy and forgiven. You see the word of Jesus didn't just calm storms and drive out demons. One time there was a man who was paralyzed and they lowered him down to Jesus through the roof and Jesus said to the man, “Your sins are forgiven.” The words of Jesus don't just calm storms and drive out demons. The words of Jesus also forgive sins. At the beginning of the service you hear Jesus' word, “Your sins are forgiven.” And when you take the Lord's Supper in a few minutes you'll hear Jesus' word, “Your sins are forgiven.” So thank Jesus for his authoritative word: it drives out Satan and it cleanses us of our uncleanness. Amen.