

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family**Title: The Authority of the Word****Lesson: Mark 1:21-28, NRSV**

²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²² They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." ²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Good morning Church! How are you doing this winter? A few days ago, the heater of my home was fixed. During this winter, my family and I didn't know if there was a problem with the heater on the first floor. That floor was always cold, but we didn't know the reason because we hadn't experienced living in a house. Then, I noticed the heater didn't work and contacted with the trustee. Thankfully, he came to my home the next morning and found that it was a filter problem. The first floor began to warm up once it was replaced. The warmth was like a miracle for us who lived without a heater during the winter, and we realized that happiness is not far away. I hope and pray in the name of the Lord that you will be happy by being careful not to catch a cold and a flu during this winter.

Today's Gospel lesson describes how Jesus began his first ministry. Each Gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' first ministry differently. Gospel Matthew describes that Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news (Mt 4:23a), and he went up to the mountain due to the crowds. (Mt 5:1a) Gospel Mark focuses on a particular synagogue in Capernaum and describes an event that Jesus drove away an unclean spirit. (Mk 1:21-28) Gospel Luke describes Jesus came to Nazareth from Galilee and proclaimed the gospel, but he was excluded. (Lk4:16-30) Gospel John describes Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine in the wedding at Cana. (Jh2:1-12)

Jesus was the center of attention once he began his ministry, and his fame began to spread all over the land.

According to today's Gospel lesson, Jesus went to Capernaum, and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue, and got an opportunity to teach as a Jew. (21) But he was from Galilee, especially Nazareth, so would not have attracted much attention until he taught. However, when he taught, people soon showed surprising responses. People in the synagogue were astounded at his teaching because he taught them as one having authority, and not as the religious leaders and scribes. (22)

At that time, Pharisees and scribes' teachings were about the law that was not related to people's hard lives. It was so perfunctory, and above all, there was no love in their teaching. But, Jesus' teaching was totally different from them. His teaching and proclamation had authority. All people in the synagogue saw the true authority from Jesus, who was from Nazareth, and were surprised.

And, even more a surprising thing happened. There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. (23) He was captured by the unclean spirit and totally lost morality and humanity. Such a person is prohibited from attending in the synagogue, but he was there because whether people didn't know him or couldn't stop him. The man with the unclean spirit cried out, looking 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." (24) Seemingly, the man seems to be raising Jesus, but he emphasizes that the origin of Jesus is Nazareth, so his words are ridiculed. He wanted Jesus not to interfere in his affairs. However, Jesus rebukes him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" (25) Jesus' proclamation with authority rebukes the evil, then the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. (26)

A lot of thoughts come to us each day. Among them, there are positive thoughts and negative thoughts. When evil thoughts come to our minds such as hate, envy, rage, and discrimination, what we can do is to defeat them by relying on the name of Jesus Christ.

Through the event, Jesus' fame and rumor spread rapidly throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. This was not because Jesus was an excellent orator,

but because his words had authority and the ability of God that the world can't imitate. Jesus' teaching had an ability to drive out evils, an ability of healing, and an ability to turn death into life. The foundation of his authority must have been the love of God.

The life of a possessed man is miserable because the owner of his life is an unclean spirit, not him. Evils try to occupy the empty room of human mind when they are not trained spiritually and mentally. I assume that people in the synagogue hadn't seen such a case of defeating an unclean spirit with words until Jesus appears. The process of Jesus' eradication of an unclean spirit was the word of life with authority, unlike the loud spells of exorcists. They could only see such authority in Jesus.

The events that Jesus drives unclean spirits out often appear in the gospel. Like this, the gospel was a spiritual battle with evil and a proclamation of freedom in the hard life of living under the control of unclean spirits. In fact, more surprising than driving the spirit out was the existence of the spirit in the synagogue. It was shocking that unclean spirits were freely active in the holy synagogue where people listen and teach God's words. But Jesus didn't allow him to be in the synagogue and rebuked, then he came out of him. People were all amazed, and they kept on asking each other, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." (27)

True authority is not only to chase away unclean spirits, but also to fully recover the lives of those who have been destroyed by evil. Furthermore, the new teaching with authority reforms the previous teachings of the synagogue through God's love, defeat all kinds of evil thoughts and minds and restore this world. Therefore, those who believe in Jesus' name and confess him as Christ are renewed by his new teaching with authority. This is the ability of true words.

This event made Jesus known as a very amazing person. At the same time, his new teaching made the powerful and religious people of that time consider Jesus a dangerous man. A word from Jesus, a warm touch on the poor, and even a meal with the marginalized were all seen as dangerous to them. But, he confronted the existing power with the authority of love.

Gospel Mark testifies that God's power is vividly alive in Jesus' gospel. I confess that there is a holy danger, abundant vitality, and the power of grace to change people. Above all, gospel has the ability to drive out evil, the ability to heal pain, the ability to correct distorted truths, and the ability to turn death into life. They are things that the secular world could never imitate.

Jesus want our lives to be renewed by the love and grace of God. If we are true disciples who follow Jesus, we must strive to convey his love to our neighbors and resemble him. Jesus want us to live, relying on his name and love and grace. His love changes our lives. May you are captured by the love and grace of God and recovered and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.