

Epiphany 4—January 28, 2024
Text: Mark 1:21-28
Theme: His Word Has Authority Today

In the Gospel for today, Jesus casts out demons. They were amazed in the synagogue that Jesus' Word had the power to do what it did when He cast out those demons. It was early in His ministry so I guess we can cut them some slack. They had not seen everything He would do yet and they were still trying to figure out who He was. That's their excuse, but what's our excuse?

Why do we sometimes doubt that Jesus is in control? We have His mighty works that were done all through His time here on earth recorded in the Holy Scriptures. We have witnessed personally the amazing feats He has accomplished in our own lives. Last summer, Danya and I we were reunited with our foster son KC after being separated for 21 years. He is now a part of our lives again and that was something for which Danya prayed unceasingly for all 21 years. When it was time, God's time not ours, he was returned to us. Sara Biladeau did not get into medical school the first time around and not knowing what she was going to do with a B.S. in Chemistry, she trusted that God would do something and He did. He opened a new door and she walked through it. Five years later she had a Ph.D. in Organic Synthetic Chemistry and then turned around and got into medical school anyway. Today she is what we lovingly refer to as a

MudFud, MD, Ph.D. Neal was ordered off the USS Lincoln and off to Sicily just days before the Lincoln was deployed into the Persian Gulf in the midst of yet another crisis in the Middle East. Over and over again we see God at work moving the parts of our lives so that they work for our good and His glory. There are some who say that it's just chance or luck but I don't believe in chance or luck. I believe that God is active every minute of every day in our lives.

Just as Jesus' Word commanded the evil spirit out of the man in the Gospel, Jesus' Word is no less powerful for us today. But Jesus' Word is a little bit like antibiotics. If you have an infection, you can go it alone and hope it gets better but generally it doesn't. It usually gets worse. In fact, it can sometimes even kill you. Years ago in Washington State, I read about a kid who got a splinter climbing trees and ended up dying because his parents didn't approve of modern medicine. They refused antibiotics and opted instead for herbal tea and poultices. He died. They had access to doctors, antibiotics, and hospitals but they refused to use them. Jesus' Word is a lot like that. He offers it to us, but He will not force us to use it.

And why do we fail to use it? For some, they are too busy living their life to bother with religion. They may not even remember the power to which they have been given access. Some are embarrassed in this modern world to speak of the Word of God

because it makes them sound simple-minded and out of touch. They prefer to suffer, but at least they seem sophisticated. Finally, some are in touch with the Word regularly but they do not really believe it has power. Church is just something nice people do. Church is a wholesome family activity but not really that important. That is why the pews are not full here every week. We have around 400 people on the roles but most of them do not believe that they absolutely need to hear the Word of God and receive His body and blood every week. Other things interfere and are deemed more important than the Word of God. Those who are here every week have learned that the Word has authority, and the Word does amazing things. So, you need to tell the others.

Make it your mission to find everyone you know who was not here this week and witness to them. Find an opportunity to tell them of the power of Christ in your life. Strive to live a life that gives a public witness of your faith for all to see and tell people why you live the way you do. Jesus did not take the possessed man somewhere privately to cast out the demon in secret. He did it in the public sight of everyone there so that they would see His power. They could not deny what they had seen with their own eyes. Can you? Go do as Jesus did for your friends, family, and neighbors so that they may know the power and authority of God's Word.

This is no easy task because while God's Word always has power, He does not always do what we want Him to do, or even believe that He should do. We all have a long list of prayers to which God has said no. We understand that God has said no, because whatever we are asking is not good even though we struggle to understand why it is not good. But to the people of weak faith or no faith, that sounds like a cop out. It sounds like we're just excusing God for failing to answer prayers. Our temptation will be to try and explain and defend God for saying no to our prayers. Don't do it. God is God and fully able to defend himself against any attack. He does not need you or me to defend Him.

Rather, just nod and smile and suggest that perhaps the answer to God's "no" is contained within the Word. Ask for help in finding that answer. Paul, in his Epistle for today encourages us to make concessions for those who are weaker in faith. Whatever we can do to draw them into the Word of God is profitable for them. That is where they will hear Him speak to them and that is where they will see Him act on their behalf. And that is where they will see His almighty power.