**Mark 1:21-28 January 31, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark the 1st chapter here re-reading these words. “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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The season of Epiphany is a season of answering that very question that we just heard. “What is this?” Magi come from the East to visit the family of a carpenter living in Bethlehem of all places and give them expensive gifts? What is that? A man who was baptized like everyone else in the Jordan River has something like a dove come to rest upon him and the very heavens open and a voice comes out to speak about him? What in the world was that all about?! The sick are healed, and restored. Water has even been turned into wine at a wedding in Cana. What is this? What’s going on? In the first place, a revelation of Christ as King on the day of Epiphany. His Baptism shows his identity as the very Son of God and our connection to God through our own Baptisms. His healing shows his authority. His miracle at the wedding feast in Cana is a revelation of his power as well as his care. These are all teaching moments throughout the season of Epiphany. And today is no different.

Today you’re going to hear, about a showdown. A confrontation years in the making. A battle between two different forces, pitted against each other, for the ultimate prize. I’m talking about Good and Evil. I’m talking about Satan, and his army of demons that breed destruction, and hate, and misery wherever they go. I’m talking about a singular confrontation that began, as Mark records it, at the beginning of Jesus’s teaching ministry, that sends shockwaves throughout the area of Galilee, and defines him as the Savior of the world.

Think about the scene that we witness in our Gospel lesson this morning. Mark’s Gospel is truly an exciting one, full of exorcisms, miracles, and direct and immediate action. Here, in the 1st chapter, we see a picture of the power of Jesus Christ, and the nature of his ministry. For he begins by teaching in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, and teaching in such a way that Mark records the people as being “astonished”. He didn’t walk in, grab the scroll, and start reading it in low and dull tones, He walked in and immediately began opening their eyes to the true nature of these Scriptures and showing them what they were really saying, and truly pointing to. It was the custom of that time that Pharisees and scribes would constantly use the term “thus says the Lord” meaning that all of their authority came from the mouth of someone else who first spoke or taught the same thing that they did. So when Jesus shows up and teaches in the synagogue, he is revealing himself as something new. Something different, someone who comes with the authority to back up His Words and the evidence of this is His teaching that blew the minds of everyone who heard him. He was something different. And he had authority.

Now think about the second scene. They were all sitting together, listening to Jesus teach, when in comes a man who had an unclean spirit. We don’t know whether he was possessed by one spirit or many, there is a case to be made it could be many spirits for He asks Jesus “What have you to do with *us* Jesus of Nazareth have you come to destroy *us*?” Here is the showdown. The confrontation. Jesus on one side, Satan’s ambassador on the other. On one hand the picture of Good, on the other, the personification of evil. It was truly a showdown, one for everyone to see and experience. It wasn’t done in a private place, but a public spot of worship. It was a test to see if Jesus truly had the authority with which he preached and he taught. It was a test to see if Jesus was who He said that he was.

And the outcome? Well, it wasn’t really a test at all. It wasn’t even a showdown. There was no threat to Christ, there wasn’t any kind of battle. Jesus, with 7 words calls out the spirit and exorcises away this demon that plagued this man and truly this whole community. “Be silent, and come out of him!” Imperative words and commands that show his dominance and authority over sin, over Satan, over evil, and over any threat to his ministry. It was a sound and complete destruction of any power that this spirit had over this man.

So the truth is that there is no showdown, there is no threat, evil is soundly and completely destroyed when it is confronted with the truth of Christ’s Word and His teaching. He is omnipotent, all powerful and has the authority to call out evil where he sees it, and destroy it with His true Word.

So if that’s the truth, why do we live in a world that seems to give the impression that Jesus and Satan are at odds with each other? Why does it seem like everywhere we look the Churches are shrinking, the pews are empty, and evil seems to be winning? Just watch the news and you’ll see evidence of evil, this very pandemic is evidence of the sinful world of disease that we live in, but the pandemic hasn’t stopped robberies, murders, cheating and a host of other sins that existed way before we fell into this mess almost a year ago. We still hear stories of corporate greed and political scandal. Why don’t we see Jesus’s sound destruction of evil in our world? Why don’t we feel like we, as Christians, are the victors in our lives? Why at times, when we are confronted with evil, and face a showdown between what we know is the truth, and what the world puts out there as a lie, do we feel outmatched? Do we feel overpowered? Or do we feel.alone?

Satan’s scheme has changed. After all, here in Mark 1:21-28 we see a skirmish in Jesus’s ministry against Satan and his demons, but even before that, in verse 12-13, Mark records the Temptation of Jesus Christ by the devil in the wilderness. Every time Satan and God face off face to face, Satan is soundly and completely destroyed, it happened in heaven when he was thrown down to earth, it happened in the temptation of Christ, it happened here with the spirit who comes to call out Jesus in the synagogue. So he changed the scheme. He changed the plan. He made it seem that he had more power than he does, and this sinful world is a showcase of the fear, despair, and destruction that Satan wants us to see, and wants us to feel. And we ourselves buy into it, when we fail in our own showdowns with sin. When we fail to rise up against the temptations put before us and instead, give in to them. When we give in to what we know is wrong, and fail to do what we know is right. We are powerless on our own to defeat sin, to be perfect, to earn salvation, and to escape death.

Which is why Christ’s victory over sin, death, the devil, and even this sinful world is our battle cry in the showdowns of our lives. Which is why Christ and His true teaching are our hope when we see how this world is corrupted by sin. Which is why Christ and His victory is our victory in the times when we fail and fall into temptation. For when we confess, He forgives. When we fail, and are defeated, we are brought up, dusted off, and given His victory over death and the grave.

A victory that came at an amazing price, when Jesus Christ, in the final confrontation and showdown against Satan, was forsaken by God the Father, beaten and whipped, mocked and reviled, and ultimately nailed to a cross to die. In that showdown it seemed that Satan had finally won, but by Christ’s death, as a perfect sacrifice for sin, Satan was defeated once and for all. And by His resurrection, death was destroyed, and the victory was declared for all of us. Because He lives. We will live. Because He won the victory over Satan, we have nothing to fear, no matter what comes at us in this world, no matter what temptations we face, and no matter how many times we fall into sin. When we confess our sins to God he forgives us and gives us the victory, a victory we couldn’t possibly win on our own, but a victory that is ours because Jesus Christ, the same Savior of old, loves us so much that He gives us His victory over sin.

I can’t tell you who’s going to win the big showdowns that we find in our own lives, in sports, in movies, in books, in television shows, in political elections, or skirmishes amongst nations around the world. I can’t promise you that this world even with a coronavirus vaccine will get better, or that we won’t be dealing with it a year from today. I can’t promise you that there won’t be evidence of evil, death, and despair all around us until Christ returns. I can’t promise you that you won’t be tempted, and that you won’t fall into that temptation. But I can promise you that the victory over Satan, and this world is complete, that it was earned by Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, and that any showdown you face in this life, you won’t face it alone. For He is with you. He remains with you in His Word, in His Sacraments, in the promises He made to never leave you on your own. We are with you, as your brothers and sisters in Christ, to listen, encourage, remind, and pray. To come and give of ourselves to help you, we are all in these struggles of this sinful world together, ready to welcome more into the peace of God’s house and His family. So go out with Christ, to face the showdown and confrontations of this world, and show them the truth to dispel the lies of our enemy. Go and take the light of the world and let it shine in all that we say, and we do.

For 5 weeks we’ve sung the very same hymn at the end of our worship here in the month of January. 394, “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise” the first Epiphany hymn after the Christmas section, a hymn that sums up in different verses exactly what we’ve been talking about in the different revelations of Jesus Christ. Today we heard about what we sing in verse 3, “Manifest in valiant fight, quelling all the devil’s might.” While this hymn has a catchy tune and is relatively easy to sing, we sang it so many times this month as a revelation in itself. Hard times may be coming, or here already, a time of hymns being sung not from hymnals in front of us, but from our memories. Again, I can’t promise you that won’t be a reality in the years to come. But I can promise you what we say in repetition over and over in this hymn, that our anthems or songs will always be addressed to Jesus Christ, the one that we are giving thanks for and praising, the one that we see revealed in this season as God in man made manifest.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.