

When Devils Are Made Silent

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY [b] January 28, 2018

MARK 1:21-28

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching. ²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ “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 out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

The terrible thing about demons is, they were created to bring messages to us.

They were not created to bring bad messages, not to bring lies and deceit, not accusations and guilt, but they were created to bring messages to us—messages of light, of words from our loving God, messages of gift.

The lies and deceit, the accusations and guilt, that’s what they started bringing to us when they fell. When they fell from being holy angels to being unholy angels, to being unclean spirits, or as Scripture often names them, demons.

But all the angels were created to bring to us messages from God. That’s what the Greek word *angel* means, messenger. Then, of these angels, some fell, becoming unholy, and instead of bringing us gifts from God who loves us, they bring us damaged gifts, partial gifts; they bring us, instead of words of life, words of death.

And we listen. For, when some of the holy angels fell and became unholy angels, our parents Adam and Eve listened, becoming unholy, too. And we are children of Adam.

So, we are fallen humans. We were not created unholy; God never intended any of that for us; we had in us no sin or death; but we listened to the fallen angel, and we fell, too.

So now, in our life as the fallen, we listen to the fallen angels, the devils.

Do we? How do listen to these demons? To listen to the demons, you don't have to go to a séance (though that is the realm of the demons), you don't have to go to a fortune teller or to someone teaching you to become one with the gods through meditation, or to an Imam (though these are the realm of the demons); to listen to the demons, all we need to do is listen to the conversation in our own consciences.

For our consciences know the Law of God. And the demons are happy to keep us under the Law's accusation. For when held under the accusation, we live in fear and despair. And fear and despair created by the Law are opposed to the faith and hope created by the Gospel.

So here's the paradox. The demons do want us to hear the word of the Lord. They just don't want us to hear the whole word of the Lord.

The demons do want us to hear the word that brings guilt and despair. They just want to refuse us the word creating hope and faith and life. They do want us to hear the Law, they just want to make sure we never have the full and free rescue of the Gospel.

So they sting our consciences. They wield the Lord's Word, but in such a way to bring us only part—the Law, but not the Gospel. They wield it in a way that the word is only partial, is damaged, is perverted, so that as we listen to the demons, we are only partial, but humans without comfort; we are damaged, living as those who must justify self; we are perverted, twisted from the health and fullness God created us for.

The devil does want us to be robbed of all knowledge that God loves us, for us to be left in despair, trying to justify ourselves, for us to be impoverished of the comfort of the Gospel that Jesus justifies by speaking his word of forgiveness.

When the Large Catechism is explaining the sentence in the Lord's Prayer where we pray, *Deliver us from evil*, it explains how in this petition Jesus is giving us to pray against the Evil one, Satan:

Since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer (John 8), he constantly seeks our life. He wreaks his vengeance whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Therefore, it happens that he often breaks men's necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and moves many to commit suicide and to many other terrible disasters.

Then the Large Catechism goes on to say,

So there is nothing for us to do upon Earth but to pray against this archenemy without stopping. For unless God preserved us, we would not be safe from [the devil] for even an hour.

The One to whom we pray is he who cast out the demon. Mark 1:22:

They were astonished at his teaching, for [Jesus] 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.

Jesus speaks as one having authority. The scribes and teachers of the Law did not teach with authority.

Authority is given. Authority is bestowed. It is to be placed in an office. So a police officer has authority because he is serving in the uniform that has been put on him; he's serving not for himself, but in an office.

A school teacher, rightly understood, has authority. For she serves not according to what she possesses of her own, but in an office bestowed upon her. She is a servant of the parents, serving in their authority.

Jesus teaches as one having authority; he has been placed in an office.

The scribes and teachers of the Law do not teach with authority. They teach with power. They teach with what they already possess in and of themselves. They teach to dominate others, to coerce and intimidate; they are teachers of the Law going around with a clipboard to audit people's lives and tally up the indiscretions. From the voice of those who teach not with authority but with power, you will hear not forgiveness and grace, but accusation.

Jesus teaches not as the scribes. Though Jesus has all power, for he is creator of all, he teaches not as the scribes, but with authority, with what has been given him by his Father for him to then give it as a gift to the sinners whom the Father loves.

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

If these people in Capernaum, these sinners who needed so desperately relief from the demonic accusations in their consciences and from the scribes—if they were astonished, then the demons who bring the accusations to keep sinners under the power of the Law, the demons are more than astonished; they are mortified, they are made silent, their accusation is made null and void, and they flee. Mark 1:25:

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”

Hearing the voice of Jesus, of the One who takes away the sin of every sinner, the demons have no more accusation:

²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing [the man] and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

This is Jesus in his authority. Mark 1:27:

And [the people] 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.”

All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Jesus. He already has all power. To create the sun and stars, to make the world and all its animals, to bestow life on Adam and Eve, Jesus already has that—power doesn't need to be given to him.

But the authority to forgive sins, the authority to take upon himself the sins of the world and to give himself over to the death of the cross to redeem every sinner, the authority to cast out demons, to rescue you and me from their accusations, to deliver us out of death and the realm of Satan and into life and the realm of holy God, this authority is the gift to him from his Father.

While we are in our sinful flesh, we are still afflicted by the unclean angels. In the life of our sinful flesh, we are still stung by the accusation of the Law and we still fall into despair and doubt, as the devil brings his lies to our consciences.

But while the devil is pleased for our consciences to hear the Law of God, as long as we are not then rescued from the Law by the Gospel, Jesus speaks to us his Gospel. He declares us forgiven of all sin. He justifies us in his grace.

This word of justification in Christ Jesus cleanses our consciences. This Word creates in us a clean heart, daily raising us up justified, clothed in the righteousness of Christ Jesus. By this Word, Jesus rescues us from the devil and claims us as his own.

When the Gospel is being proclaimed, when sins are being forgiven, when one who belongs to Christ is speaking grace and forgiveness to a brother or sister in Christ, when the word of comfort and encouragement replaces the word of accusation and judgment, when any sinner hears the Word of Jesus which cleanses the conscience, Jesus is making the devils silent.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.