

Matt Henry
Mark 1:21-28
28 Jan 2018

“Galilee’s Got Talent”

Grace and peace...

The text for today is the Gospel lesson we heard earlier, Mark 1 where Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man. From this brief exchange Jesus’ identity and authority as the Holy One of God is affirmed. Part of the challenge about handling texts like this is we have lost the whole element of that initial surprise. We all know what Jesus is going to do in accounts like these. He is going to drive out the demon, cleanse the leper, heal the sick and so on. He does all of those things in Mark 1. We expect Him to do it. These are His talents as the Holy One of God. So part of the challenge today is how can we recreate and appreciate that element of surprise that properly belongs to what Jesus does? In order to do that, I have to explain just who this old, bald guy is on the front of your worship folder. But before we get there, let’s make sure we set the stage for this Jesus Talent Show—otherwise known as Mark 1.

Verse 21, “And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.” Jesus has just called Simon, Andrew, James and John as disciples. They are the who that goes into Capernaum. But if you notice, it doesn’t say “they” went into the synagogue. It

says “he” entered the synagogue , so there’s something to clarify in your minds right off the bat. The disciples see other exorcisms, but probably not this one. It’s their first day on the job as disciples. They are as new as it gets. As to the where, this is happening at the synagogue in Capernaum which is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Lynn and Donnette just got back from Israel and I’m sure they went to this fishing town. This is the disciples’ hometown which may help explain a little why they weren’t there. Capernaum becomes the center of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. As to the when, this is the Sabbath, so we are looking at Saturday morning worship most likely.

We also should consider the why. Synagogues are not mentioned in the entire Old Testament, so why did they exist? The purpose of the synagogue was for the instruction of the law, the reading of the Law (Torah). It would start with the Shema in Deut. 6:4 (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one), then a prayer, then a reading from the Law, then a reading from the Prophet. Then came a sermon which you’ll be glad to know was short and it could be offered by any man in the community if they cleared it with the ruler of the synagogue. So there was variety. It wasn’t just the priest’s job or something like that. Then came the Aaronic blessing and that’s the order of worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath.

However, the order of the day is going to be a little different because of the pending spiritual confrontation we know is coming. People are already amazed at the teaching of Jesus. They are astonished! It's not what they had expected. They had never seen anything like that before. He blew their minds. How can I do that today for us here and still keep my job?

I want you to meet a friend of mine. This man's name is John Hetlinger. I know him from my vicarage congregation in Broomfield, Colorado. When I went back there over New Year's to watch my beloved Kansas City Chiefs play in Denver, people were still talking about John. He is a retired LCMS pastor and has this true zeal for life. Such a character! In 2016, John went on America's Got Talent and I have a three-minute video clip to share with you that shows how that turned out.

Watch the full clip here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdawGqV4LS0>

Now, how's that for being astonished? Did you see people's faces? He did make it through by the way, the judges approved 3-1. Heidi Kulm wouldn't go for it.

But John has gone onto other fame and become something of an octogenarian sensation. It's fair to say, no one expected this.

The result of astonishment is it gets people talking and this was no less the case with Jesus when He was on stage, so to speak, in the synagogue. He is teaching. Eyes are trained on Him. But there is something about what He is saying that the man possessed with an evil, unclean spirit cannot sit silent any longer. This is very interesting to me because who knows how long this guy was there? Did he just show up or was he a regular? I ask that because the scribes were understandably comfortable in the synagogue. They taught, but they taught out of human opinion and interpretation. One rabbi says this, but another says this. Or they just stuck with rote words and stale traditions. There was no real authority or truth being put forward. And as a result, the unclean spirit was likely comfortable there in the synagogue. That makes me think about preaching today that is weak or devoid of truth, preaching that does not have Jesus at the center. I just wonder if an unclean spirit could sit back in some churches today and take it in with no problem. None of you are shrieking so either you are demon free or I need to preach with more authority!

When real authority and truth shows up, the unclean spirit cannot stand the teaching of Jesus. He cannot resist that authority! So he launches into a

public confrontation. “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!” (v. 24)

Well, who makes the next move? The ruler of the synagogue came and threw out the man with the unclean spirit? No. The scribes and lawyers cast out the demon? No. By the way, do you know why the scribes and lawyers couldn't drive out demon from this man? *Because everybody knows possession is nine tenths of the law!* But Jesus has all authority and He rebukes the unclean spirit, “Be silent and come out of him!” With a shriek, he's gone. Talk about “let the body hit the floor” but only as a man set free. And everyone knew in that moment, “Galilee's Got Talent.” His fame spread everywhere.

And the only thing that people can say is “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” But they should have asked, “Who is this?” That's the right question to ask in the Gospels. Who is this Jesus? And it's something the demon actually gets right. “I know who you are.” By grace of the Holy Spirit, we also know who Jesus is.

Jesus is showing Himself as Christ the Victor here. Christ the Victor for this man, Christ the Victor for mankind, setting us free from the tyranny of evil. Even the unclean spirits are commanded to obey him and they do. With this very first exorcism, the kingdom of darkness is on notice that the power of Satan is able to

be overcome by this authority that is in Jesus' name. Jesus is Lord because that's who He is.

The part that we have to wrestle with is that Jesus commands us to do things and we may or may not do them. Apparently, in this regard, we have that choice. What authority does Jesus have in your life? That is a sincere question. Is it a complete authority? Or only under certain circumstances? Does Jesus outrank you? I would expect most of us here can say we love Jesus, we respect Him, we are thankful for Him. We acknowledge Him as Savior. But that's not the same as knowing Jesus as Lord. How can you tell? When you find yourself doing something you don't want to do, but do it anyways. I mean, as a parent, when our kids don't want to do something, but they do it anyways, does that count? Of course it counts! It counts even more than if they had not complained about it even because I know they are growing through it. They are acknowledging a greater authority and choosing to obey. So how do you think the Father regards us as His children?

Jesus is Lord whether we obey Him or not. But His Lordship is best expressed and made known through our obedience, when we ask Him to rule over every aspect of our lives. Be the king of me. It's in the yielding of ourselves,

it's in the recognition of His authority over us. He's the King. And it's good to just say it out loud. Jesus is King of me. He's not only the Lord. He's my Lord.

The place in your life that the Lordship or non-Lordship of Christ is going to show up is in discipleship because that is what he has commanded. Discipling, by the way, is also a remarkable talent of Jesus—to not only make you a disciple, but you to make you a disciple maker. That's something I want you to say “yes” to. It doesn't mean you have to know how, but only that you want it to happen in your life. Yes, we believe in Jesus. But let us also say, yes, we are living for Jesus and we want our lives to spread the fame and glory that He deserves. If we do this, we will find ourselves even more surprised and astonished by Him.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learn more at
<http://www.truthortradition.com/articles/the-synagogue>

The layout of the synagogue is also very interesting. It is similar to the temple in its layers and tiers and holy places/items.

