

**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**  
**Title: The Power of Words**  
**Text: Mark 1: 21-28**

When one hear certain phrases: I love you, I hate you, Go Away! Many images, emotions, and feelings are evoked to the forefront of our minds. Words like honor, courage, and love carry with them their own special meanings. The phrase “I do” has great significance for those who are married and have a life together. Words cause emotion, famous speeches have driven people to action. Pain, joy, grief, and inspiration are one of many emotions that are a result of words. And many times how something is said can leave emotional scars that haunt somebody for the rest of our lives. I’m sure all of us have experienced how a friendly greeting or compliment can brighten and lift a day or even how a snide remark or the phrasing of certain words to a person can utterly ruin their entire demeanor and destroy their day.

But with words another meaning is to be included in our thoughts for today, that of authority. Who would people be more willing to listen to the President of the United States, or a grocery store clerk? The president is a leader who in a few words can move thousands of people at a whim. The actions of one man can have far reaching effects for us in our day and age. But what do words have to do authority? When a person speaks is depends on who they are coming from. And in our reading today we are seeing the power of words that Jesus had over a crowd and the power of words over the spiritual. And with that authority of who he is we

have true power. And this is not just because of the fact that he is the Son of God, but because scripture refers to the actual Word of God as living. Where do we see examples of this? To start we can go all the way back to the beginning of Scripture and look to the creation of the world. A fancy theological term stated as creation ex nihilo, meaning out of nothing God created. He spoke and it came into existence, in an instance. Another example we see in Scripture is that of Romans 10:17 where faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and also Is. 55:11 God's Word does not come back empty. These are just a few of the many examples that shows God's authority and power of his Word. And God's Word does have power, with it there is always an action or reaction to it. Our modern world always reacts to the word of God, many times negatively. The authority of God's word in our culture is seen as counter cultural, archaic, outdated and broken.

When many people hear the word authority, many times we think of the overbearing boss, the hard teacher, the dictator of a country who sits in their position of might subjugating everybody below them. Our world and society will look to Scripture and not regard it as authoritative, many will instead look to Scripture and say that the Bible is not the Word of God, it only contains the Word of God. And as such make Scripture to be subjective and false. Others will look to the authority of Scripture and claim that it is repressive, biased, and subjective to whoever reads it.

Jesus addressed this issue with His teaching. Back in biblical times when Scribes or teachers spoke, they would always cite a previous teacher or teaching and quoting church fathers was a particular favorite at this time. No one dared to make claims that were not already accepted or mandated by the law. The scribes were quick to cite important names and important teachers, this was done to give what they had to say more credence. But the fact of the matter was they were not interested in the heart of the matter it was more for the upholding and elevation of the Torah-the law. The endless duties of the Law is what interested these men, the centuries of oral tradition and memory was most important. And since these men studied the law they were experts on the passing of judgment in regards to the law. So to teach without mentioning, or citing was seen as awkward or wrong. This sort of thing was just not done!

Jesus authority, His Word came to the congregation in Capernaum and was succinct, he cut to the chase. He didn't muddle with Rabbinical fathers, or Rabbinical Law. He told the people what it was that they needed to hear, and most likely it was similar to what we see earlier in this chapter. He told the people in "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Gospel." He was showing them that he was the Christ. Our text tells us ( read v. 22) and our English does not portray the strength of what happened with the people. The word used here is ekkhssein which mean that the people reacted as though they had been struck by a blow, a good word for this would be dumbfounded. The people were absolutely

dumbfounded that this person, this Jesus sitting in front of them would be teaching with such authority and NOT like the teachers who taught in the synagogue. The psychology presented here is interesting meaning every person there would have been hanging on his every word. When Jesus taught there was no break between the message and the messenger. The message given was the intent of God. The people heard all of this and were amazed.

I cannot imagine what it would have been like to have been in that audience viewing this. The same Word that would speak and the entire Universe would respond was here in a church talking to the people here giving them a straight forward message and quoting no one! But even so, we have the Word of God, here in front of us today and yet people read and hear the Word of God and doubt it. We all do! We all do this! We doubt the truth and promises that God gives us because the answers we want are not on our time. We doubt the love that God has for us because of so much pain in our lives and we wonder at times if he is truly there. And many times we doubt simply the Words we hear on Sunday or read in our Bible. Many times when people hear the Word of God it is not with amazement is it? We many times see the reaction to this as rejection.

And quite plainly dear people this is a result of two things: our sinful selves (flesh) and the Satan who is known as the Father of Lies. We become so caught up in the trials of our daily lives we don't recognize God in our lives, we don't believe in his promises because of struggles and we doubt.

Jesus gave his message, stopped and then...silence. Then our reading tells us a demon possessed man comes forward and screams, "I know who you are Jesus of Nazareth! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-the Holy One of God." The silence is shattered abruptly by the noise of this man. The demon is forced to present himself to Christ. And Jesus instantly silences the demon by telling him to be quiet. The term the original language uses is "muzzle it". The appointed time and place for the revealing of who Jesus is was not intended to be exposed in this manner. Even though what the demon said was true this is not the type of endorsement Jesus would necessarily want. It would be like having Hitler come forward as a character witness. An endorsement of faith is what Jesus received when he healed and helped people. The confessions Christ wanted were those that were acts of faith not from somebody who already knew and recognized him for who he was. So Jesus Rebukes the demon and in the original language of Scripture tells the demon to leave the man in three little words. And the demon who has been commanded by the living and active Word of God has to do just that. The same living Word of God, that could have stopped the men who were flogging him didn't, the same living Word that could have taken himself off the cross didn't, the same living Word died for us whose word had no standing with God. By dying and rising we know have a standing with God. And eventually three words would be uttered by Christ assuring our salvation in him "it is finished." Which

presents forth another reality, “you are forgiven.” And it is because of that sacrifice, those Words that we know we are forgiven.

Remember what was mentioned earlier in our sermon, the same Word that created the Universe, the same Word that gives us faith, the same Word that goes back to God doing work, is the same Word that has made us new and also tells us we are forgiven. We will struggle with this because we are sinful, it is hard as people to believe in the words it is finished. You are forgiven. I love you. But as we journey through our lives we know that God’s Word has power, it is power and it is in this that we have confidence, joy, peace, and comfort. The power of words is an amazing thing especially when they come from one whose words cause action.

Therefore because of the Word of God is a great thing, a living Word we know that just as in the last chapter of Matthew....and surely I am with always to the very end of the age. Take this with you confidently as you go throughout your week.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.