

Barre Congregational Church

January 28, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fourth Sunday of the Epiphany** ~

"The One who spoke with Authority."

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Mark 1 21 - 28

I. Introduction:

To be in positions of authority is not always the easiest place to be in, whether at home or at work, in the community or at church. To speak and act with authority that is given to you, or that you assume because of your specific role, means to act in a way that gives good and useful guidance and direction to those following, with good outcomes for everyone. Sometimes such authority can be misused and can lead to the abuse of such power and lack of good guidance, decision making and to bad and even destructive outcomes. And so, the one who speaks and acts with authority also carries with them the responsibility to take such authority seriously.

II. The man possessed with an evil spirit:

Here in Mark, we see Jesus having a second encounter with Satan, the evil one, right at the beginning of His public ministry. In the first, He is directly challenged and tempted by Satan in the desert, to give up His authority and listen to the one who promised to give Him the earthly kingdoms if He were to bow before him and throw himself down from the highest temple. In our passage He is about to enter the synagogue in Capernaum, a city where many would come for their fishing business, and so many would take the opportunity to come and listen to Him. Right there He is stopped by a man with an evil spirit, screaming at Him and challenging Him about who He was, "What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!" The force of darkness takes a direct aim at the force of light, the One he recognizes and obviously the One whom he fears. He takes aim at His authority, but Jesus would not have it. He instructs the force to be quiet, and in a violent manner and a shriek in his voice,

the force leaves the man, and submits to the Divine power and authority of Jesus, the Messiah. In both instances we see the chaotic, yet unsuccessful interruption of what Jesus' mission was all about, to bring love, peace, and healing to the people He encountered.

III. The One who spoke with authority:

Those who saw what happened, first acknowledged that this Man, Jesus, was different from the other teachers, that He spoke with authority. Is this a new teaching, they asked. Only then did they notice that He drove out the evil spirit, and that even the evil spirits obeyed Him. In typical exorcisms, there are specific rituals to drive out demons, but as Mark L. Strauss says in his commentary on Mark, Jesus only needed to speak a word, with no additional actions needed. The power of His word was an indication of Who He was, which was to preach the Good News of love and peace to the people who needed it. Jesus, in His travels saw the needs of people. He already knew that the conditions of humanity needed someone who truly cared, and someone with the capacity to make them feel better, to heal them and to transform their lives. So, He rose up in authority to clear His path from anything that would stand in His way to accomplish this mission. Strauss asserts that through His Messianic words and deeds, the power of the Kingdom of God was realized into the human existence. What we see is the struggle between God and Satan, good and evil, darkness and light. This is not a struggle that humanity in their own power can effectively fight and win, but a struggle that can only be overcome through the Divine power and authority that speak and bring light into the darkness. Humanity must surrender to the divine authority and take on the full armor of God, which is what Paul describes in Ephesians 6 v 10 – 20, to take on the belt of truth, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and pray in the Spirit. That is when the full authority of God to protect against the forces of darkness, can be seen, experienced, and felt.

IV. Conclusion:

While Mark describes the struggle between Christ and the evil force that took over the life of this man in the synagogue, we are living in a world where the forces of darkness operate openly. We see deliberate harm done to innocent people, we see unacceptable suffering because of poverty and the inability of many to make it in this life, we see the darkness of

racism, and we see the hurting of the other, because of what they believe, how they look and what they stand for. We see and experience darkness among us when we cannot find our loving way with one another, but always look for ways to be against someone. We often do not operate with one hope and one vision of peace and togetherness, and therefore lack the ability to support one another. Our differences of opinion tend to drive us apart, rather than being opportunities to work things out and move forward together. Jesus is not having any of this. He came to speak about the Kingdom of heaven, and He knows how the forces of darkness operate. He will speak and reveal to us through the work and authority of the Holy Spirit what is happening, and He will quiet the forces of darkness in ways we cannot stop.

We, as the church of Christ must listen to Him when He counsels us to be on the path of righteousness and to bring this light further and further into this world. May God help us to yield to the authority of Christ's message and may those around us feel the peace of God coming from us, because we have allowed the living and peaceful Spirit of God to dwell within us. Amen