

Sermon – Mark 1:21-28
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Grace Lutheran Church
4 Epiphany – Year B
28 January 2024

“A Word of Power and Grace”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One can't help but wonder what was going through the minds of Andrew and Simon, James and John as they walked out of last Sunday's text, no doubt humming the instant Sunday school classic, "I will make you fish for people." Of course, they probably learned it with the original, outdated patriarchal lyrics; "fishers of men," and all that. I learned through a recent Google search gone sideways that this is actually the title of a dating handbook. But I digress. Whatever these four first disciples were thinking about probably didn't square with what they immediately experience. As you know, everything happens *immediately* in Mark's gospel, the narrative hurtling headlong from Galilee to the cross. Hoping for a little Discipleship 101 to get their feet wet? No such luck. As soon as Jesus announces the time fulfilled and the Kingdom come near, the resistance to God's reign kicks its rebellion into high gear.
2. They come to Capernaum. Jesus takes it upon himself to teach in the synagogue, and something about his manner, the authority with which he speaks, piques the people's curiosity. As they wonder, astounded, unable to put their fingers on just what it is about Jesus that seems different, there is one in their midst who knows. The unclean spirit, this demonic force, sees Jesus for who he is: The Holy One of God. Is this the end for the spirit? Has Jesus come to destroy it? In the background can you hear James whisper to

John, "I thought he said fish for people, not fight the demons." But as they quickly learn, to follow Jesus is to enter all the way into the fight for this world's redemption. Evil mounts its resistance for one very specific reason: Jesus has come to cast it out. What looks like one little exorcism is actually eschatological in scope. The work Jesus has come to do is not, finally, the casting out of this world's demons. It is the creation of a new world in which evil has no part; it will be cast out along with sin and death, its partners in the triad opposed to the Trinity, as a new world emerges in which the only thing that will possess us is the love of God that ever sets us free.

3. Perhaps we are not so different from the first followers of Jesus, although we might get there from a different direction. Love and peace, sure, but demons? Aren't they a little passé? Haven't we outgrown such superstitions? I confess I don't know how best to define them. I'm pretty sure they're not little red guys with horns and pitchforks. Or maybe they are. What I do know is that we live in a world in which evil is not only real, but always seems somehow greater than the sum of its parts. Human sin cannot be discounted, nor dare we pass the buck for our failings, but it takes more than hate and complacency to create holocaust and genocide. The demonic is all too willing to accept our offerings and turn this world further away from God's purposes, further away from the justice and peace at the heart of God's creative intention.
4. Justice and peace. These are the things for which we promise to strive in the covenant of our baptism, promises which we affirm in the rite of Confirmation. Last week in class, I asked our confirmands how we're doing. Is the world a just and peaceful place? Being Grace confirmands, and therefore wise beyond their years, they had no problem listing off all that's wrong in the world. War. Racism. White supremacy. Human-driven climate change. Gun violence. On and on. What can 7th and 8th graders in the Chicago suburbs

do against such things? And isn't Jesus going to come back and fix it all anyway? Need we do anything at all?

5. A few nights ago, our family watched *Miracle* for about the 462nd time, because if we are able to take a break from watching hockey, obviously we're going to watch a movie about hockey. The movie, as you may know, tells the story of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Men's Hockey team and their miraculous victory over the famously fearsome Soviet squad. Matched up in the semifinals with a shot at gold on the line, the Americans and the Russians are locked in tense battle, the outcome uncertain, the U.S. team clinging to a tenuous one-goal lead as the final ten minutes ticked away. Watching this sequence, one of our sons blurted out, "I know what's going to happen, but I'm so nervous!"
6. Unlike Jesus' disciples in those early days of following, we know what's going to happen. Jesus will go to the cross and be raised from the dead. The demonic will be routed, and Christ will come again to claim the final victory. But we still live in the middle, don't we? Evil prowls, lurking around corners, stalking the hidden depths of our hearts. But here's the thing: even in the middle of the story, evil knows the jig is up. What has Jesus to do with the forces of evil? This Holy One of God, this long-awaited prophet, this Son who lives in the *unmediated* presence of the Father will *immediately* put evil to flight. Yes, the demons desperately cry a bit longer, convulsing creation on their way out, but they *are* on their way out. One little word subdues them, and that word is nothing other than *the Word*, Jesus Christ.
7. Which brings us back to our confirmands. What are we to do about peace and justice in this world in which so much is still wrong? Well, they told me, we are to work to bring justice and peace into being, in ways big and small, however and wherever we can. Because if the end of the story is certain, our call is to make the middle a sign of the world to come. Already in our Baptism

we have renounced the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises. To renounce something usually means to give up claim or possession of something, but in Holy Baptism we also renounce the claim of evil upon us, the power of anything but Christ to possess us. Christ, with authority and grace, has silenced evil. He shuts it up and casts it out, beckoning us now to follow him. Where? Out of this world and into the new creation, but also ever more deeply into this world, lamps lit against the darkness, bringing the peaceable Kingdom, working justice to the glory of the One who has justified us, pushing back against evil, always in hope, until the new creation emerges. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.