

Title: "The Kingdom Comes in Word and Deed"

Text: Mark 1:21-34; 3:20-30

This past Tuesday we had another election day.

- And no matter what you thought of the results, Governors, Senators, State Reps, and all sorts of other elected officials will soon be taking oaths of office as we inaugurate another term of government.
- This is the political context in which we live our lives.

The past two weeks we have also been looking at the political context in which Jesus lived as he walked on the earth.

- And last week we saw what a radical kind of thing it was for Jesus, in his political context of Roman occupation, -to inaugurate his ministry by proclaiming, "The time has come. The *Kingdom of God* is near. Repent and believe the good news."

Jesus was not just talking about electing some new officials to the Roman governmental system,

- but about inaugurating a whole new Kingdom, with a new kind of King, and a whole new set of values, priorities, and ways of doing things.

In today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, we are told what happened on one of Jesus very first days of inaugurating that Kingdom.

- Listen as I read what happened from Mark 1:21-34.

So we come in on Jesus in the little town of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee.

- It is the home town of Peter, Andrew, James, and John, the fishermen whom Jesus has called to be his first disciples.

And on the Sabbath, they all go to the synagogue as was the custom for all good Jews.

- But this day would not be customary for the Jews in Capernaum at all.
- Jesus took advantage of a custom, which allowed visiting rabbis to participate in worship at the invitation of the local rabbi and synagogue leaders.

-And so at the appropriate time Jesus was asked to make his own comments on the portion of Torah that had been read that day.

And Mark does not tell us what the passage was, or what the content of Jesus' teaching was,
-but he tells us its affect upon the people.
V. 22 says, "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

You see, right off the bat, there's something about the way Jesus teaches that is noticeably different to people,
-than what they have been accustomed to.
-And what they notice is that Jesus teaches with authority.

-He doesn't quote other rabbis, or appeal to the whole tradition of rabbinic teaching.
-Instead he says things like, "You have heard it said, 'Do not murder.' But I say to you, that anyone who is even angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."

See what I mean? Jesus teaches as though he knows exactly what the true meaning of the law is,
-and he lays it on the line: "I say unto you,..." Boom.

But it's not only Jesus' teaching that amazes the people at the synagogue in Capernaum that day.
-As Jesus is teaching, there is a man at the synagogue with a demon that manifests itself in response to Jesus presence.

In fact, there seems to be more than one demon possessing this man,
-because the voice that speaks says, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"

And it's probable that the people of the synagogue had no idea that this man was possessed by demons.

- If they had known, he probably wouldn't have been welcomed at the synagogue.
- But the demons can't stand the presence and the teaching of Jesus.

In his presence they are writhing in fear and apprehension,
-and they manifest themselves.

This, in itself, is probably stunning to the people gathered at the synagogue.

- But what really stuns them is Jesus' handling of the situation.
- He speaks directly to the demons themselves,
 - tells them simply but sternly to be quiet,
 - and then orders them to come out of the man.

And with a shriek the spirits shake the man and flee out of him.

- It says in v. 27, "The people were so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching – and with authority. He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.'

You see, this was no ordinary day at the synagogue.

- Jesus was no ordinary rabbi.
- There was a power, and an authority about him, which was like nothing people had ever seen before.

They had heard rabbis teach before.

They had even seen priests go through the rituals for exorcizing demons.

But they had never seen anyone who taught or cast out demons like that.

- Mark says, "News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."

You bet it did. And you know what they were saying.

- The time has come! The Kingdom of God may be near!
I think it's really the Anointed One. The Messiah.
- You've got to come and hear him and see him.

But you know what? it was the Sabbath day, and news couldn't spread that quickly on the Sabbath in Israel,
-because it was against the Sabbath laws to travel more than to the local synagogue on the Sabbath.
So it wasn't until that evening after sunset, when the Sabbath was officially over,
-that people from all over the region of Capernaum showed up at Peter's door where Jesus was staying.

Now the news had spread, and they had all heard what Jesus had done that morning.
-And they brought him many who were sick, or had diseases, or were demon possessed.
-And Jesus healed them, and cast out their demons.
-He had also healed Peter's own mother-in-law that afternoon at the house.

It was quite a day of "Kingdom ministry."

And what I want us to notice here, is that Jesus didn't just come talking about this new Kingdom of God;
-He came bringing that new Kingdom of God with him.
-And the exorcisms and healings he did, were signs of the Kingdom's presence.

And people were astonished at the results.
-Here was a guy who didn't just talk and make promises.
-He actually meant what he said, and delivered on his promises: right then and there!

And Jesus would say, "This is why I came.
And He would quote the Prophet Isaiah saying,
"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,
because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives,
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
-to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
-and to comfort all who mourn."

Jesus would say, "This is who I am. That Scripture is fulfilled in me!"

And that news was good news to many in Israel.

-But as we know, not everyone was so pleased with this new Kingdom Jesus came to inaugurate,
-or that he was pretty much claiming to be the king of that new Kingdom!

And as we read in our earlier reading from Mark 3,

-some people who heard the things Jesus was proclaiming and saw the healings and exorcisms Jesus was doing,
-thought he was in league with the devil!

They thought his miraculous powers must be some kind of occult powers:

-more like magic or voodoo or witchcraft.

But Jesus, when he heard people say such things, replied,

"Hey, if I was in league with the devil, I wouldn't be casting out his demons.

-It would mean Satan was opposing Satan. That doesn't make sense.

-A Kingdom divided against itself can't stand."

But then Jesus goes on to give a little metaphor to more accurately describe what kind of "kingdom clash" is really going on in his ministry.

He says, "No one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house."

And that might seem like an odd thing to say.

-But think for a moment about what Jesus is getting at.

Jesus is telling these people who think that he is in league with Satan,

-that he is not Satan's colleague or friend at all.

He is saying that he has actually come to enter Satan's house,

-to tie Satan up, and to rob him of his possessions.

Now maybe you have never thought about Jesus as a thief or a robber!

- But when it comes to Satan's dominion of earth, and his power over people's lives,
- Jesus sees himself as a robber who is plundering Satan's domain.

Or on this Veteran's Day, we might say that Jesus sees Himself as the King of a liberating army,
-who has come to take down a despotic tyrant and establish a just regime on earth again.

Because remember, the overarching story of the whole Bible is this:

- God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them and it was all very good.
- But Satan entered the creation and tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God and they fell into sin,
-and the goodness of all creation was tainted and spoiled.

-And ever since, the world has been under the dominion of sin and death and hell.

- And people have been held captive to the darkness of fear, and doubt, and hatred, and war,
-of death and dying,
-of separation from God.

But God promised right there in the Garden of Eden as he condemned the serpent Satan,
-that He would ultimately redeem the world from Satan's power.
-That One would come who was the offspring of woman,
-who would ultimately crush the serpents head and defeat him.

The Bible is the story of God working out that plan of redemption.

And Jesus says here, that he sees himself as the one who came into this world for the very purpose of binding up the strong man Satan, and setting the captives free.

-He sees himself as one who is robbing Satan's house,
and overcoming the power of the evil one.

He is not in league with the Prince of Demons,
but Satan's greatest foe.

-So Jesus is telling everyone, that every time he casts out
a demon,
-he is binding the strong man and robbing him of one
more of his captives.

And Jesus warns the teachers and leaders of Israel to be
careful about saying otherwise.

-He says, "If you guys can't see that what I am doing is
actually in fulfillment of the Scriptures,
-that I am actually the 'seed of the woman who crushes
the serpents head,'
-then you are in deep trouble.

-You will actually be setting yourselves up against the
Scriptures that you teach,
-and against the work of the Holy Spirit himself,
-and against the whole redemption of creation which
God is bringing about.

-And if you do that you show yourselves to be citizens of
the wrong kingdom altogether."

My friends, on this Veteran's Day, which is actually the 100th
Anniversary of the first Armistice Day,
-when on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in
1918, the First World War was ended,
-we want to celebrate peace,
-but I also want to invite us all to enlist or re-enlist in Jesus
Kingdom army.

As citizens of Jesus' Kingdom, he calls us to follow him into
spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness.

-He asks us to join him in preaching good news to the poor,
and proclaiming release for the captives,
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed and proclaim the year of the
Lord's favor.

He asks us to trust that at the cross, the strong man Satan was actually bound and defeated,
-and that now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we get to push back against the darkness of the world,
-and invade his territory with the light of the gospel.
-We get to join Jesus in plundering Satan's household, and releasing those who have been held captive to sin and self, to addictions and fears, to idols and lies.

We get to be agents of grace and reconciliation in the world.
-We get to be citizens of a new kind of Kingdom who get to live out the new life of that Kingdom right here in our own world wherever we are.

We don't always think of ourselves as soldiers of King Jesus,
-but on this Veteran's Day, why not?

-Let's go forth at this 11th hour, on this 11th day of this 11th month of this year 2018
-to serve our King as faithful soldiers of His Kingdom's forces for the redemption in the world.

Let's pray.