

2-7-21 Sermon- Maybe I'm Amazed

Scripture- Mark 1:21-28, CTW PS111

Hymns- 531, 533, 85

Theme- This passage reminds us that we are to be in a constant state of amazement with the Word of God and the way that Jesus puts it upon our hearts by virtue of the Holy Spirit. We should not ever discount the authority of it all, even though the world tends to do just that. Make a resolution to that effect this year, for your life!

I. When In Church, do you become amazed by Jesus? The authority and power of Jesus amazed everyone in the synagogue of Capernaum. That should still be true for us and it should make church more relevant than ever today.

A. Truth is, Covid or no Covid, the current trend is that we live in a time of declining church attendance. One reason is busyness; Sunday mornings are consumed with youth sports, catching up on the laundry or the lawn, or just chilling out after a busy week.

Another reason might be that going to church is not as much of a thing people do these days. If you think about the houses on your street, I'm guessing not too many people on your street go to church every week.

I think the biggest reason for many people, however, is that church doesn't seem relevant. They don't feel worship and meeting together makes much difference in their lives, and they don't see much impact from church involvement.

Churches try all sorts of things to be relevant. We hear of cowboy churches with boots and rodeos, and churches whose hipster pastors and worship leaders wear ridiculously expensive shoes. Some put in an espresso bar, play to politics or patriotism, or bring in celebrities to draw a crowd.

Most churches—ours included—try to improve the quality of their music and video, grow their presence on social media, and create

more inviting environments for gathering. Those things aren't all bad! But they don't get to the core issue: How does church—especially worship and teaching—become relevant, even life-changing?

B. After Jesus called Simon and Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing nets and fish for people, they all went to church. Well, not church like we know it, but the synagogue in Capernaum, where Simon Peter lived. Simon and his friends had gone to the synagogue for years but going with Jesus was unforgettable and life-changing for them.

As we follow them to the synagogue, we are looking for answers to our question:

II. HOW DOES CHURCH BECOME RELEVANT?

A. First We Must Go To Church With Jesus. (verses 21-22)

Isn't that obvious? Believe it or not, in these days and times, you **can** do church without Jesus. You will hear his name mentioned in most churches, but that doesn't mean people are personally encountering Jesus at church.

I imagine synagogue worship in Capernaum was pretty routine. People nodded hello to their neighbors, and then sat down, trying to focus on God or living a good life. They heard the traditional rhythmic prayers and joined in repeating familiar psalms.

Someone read from the Torah (the law) and the Haftorah (the words of the prophets or elders), with comments or discussion. The comments often reflected the teachings of the great rabbis: "Rabbi Shimeï said...," or Rabbi Hillel said...," or "It has been said by the elders..." On a good day, there would be some delightful rabbinical stories to maintain interest. Then everyone went home for another week.

Change some details, liven up the music, and put a "professional" up front, and it is not too much different from how many people experience church today.

If all we have to offer is the quality of the music, the cleverness of the message, or the practical wisdom they hear, why should

anyone bother going to church? They can find all of that on their phones or computers customized to their preferences.

In our passage today, the synagogue was set up for yet another routine meeting, when Jesus showed up. It seems that he was invited to speak that day, and something was different:

Mark 1:21-22 “They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, **because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.**”

B. What was there about Jesus? He didn't appeal to the rabbis or the traditions of the elders; he spoke on his own authority. From the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel, we know that Jesus sometimes said, “You have heard that it was said...**but I say to you...**” He spoke on his own authority.

The message of Jesus was unprecedented and breathtaking. Mark 1:15 summarizes Jesus' message as, “The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Jesus' message was that the Messiah was coming, and the kingdom of God—the rule of God that brings righteousness, health, and hope—was already coming in his words and deeds.

Jesus spoke with authority, **and he forced people to decide:** “Am I in, or am I out of the kingdom movement?”

When we recognize the authority of Jesus, going to church is never dull or boring. **Our lives are on the line, and He requires us to listen and make a decision each time we worship!**

Think of it this way: You are sitting in the doctor's office, your heart weak and your condition precarious. The doctor recommends surgery—risky surgery, that will either restore your health or lead to death. The decision is yours; are you in or out? One thing is sure: You are not bored or disinterested...your life is on the line here!

C. What if your life were on the line every Sunday? If you decide in advance that whatever Jesus says (not the pastor, your wife, or another at church)—whatever Jesus says to you,

through the Bible and the Holy Spirit—you will obey and build your life around that—you will be hanging on every word when you come to church! So, in that way you are all here as individuals because NO ONE can make that decision for you!

Therefore we must conclude that when EVERY SUNDAY we ARE CALLED TO recognize the authority of Jesus over us personally, this time we have in worship becomes intensely relevant!

III. IN CHURCH WE CONFRONT EVIL! (Verses 23-26)

A. There was a man in that synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit!

Had no one recognized how messed up he was, or did they all see it, but not know what to do?

We don't know exactly what was going on with this man. Was he demon-possessed, oppressed by an evil spirit?

In our culture, we might not recognize the impure spirits that possess people, and we certainly don't want to say that every troubled person is possessed by a demon.

Evil takes many forms, and people might struggle with emotional illness, impurity, oppression, confusion, or obsessions. The exact nature of the oppression might not be known; it might be psychological, physical, or spiritual, but it is evil nonetheless.

In a typical church service, there are people with various kinds of addictions, some obvious, and some hidden. Some are struggling with lust, rage, or bitterness, while others are lying to themselves and others.

Some are slaves to greed and materialism, pride, or insecurity. Some are hurting the people around them, unable to stop their destructive behavior. All of that is evil—a spirit of evil that can oppress, even possess people.

B. When Jesus goes to church with you, evil is threatened! The impure spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum took over the voice of the man, recognizing Jesus as the Holy One of God! Jesus spoke with authority, commanding the impure spirit to leave the man. The spirit left the man with a shriek.

Jesus often confronted evil—evil spirits, and all kinds of evil. He boldly told people to repent, accept the rule of God, and become his disciples. He threatened the power of evil, and there was pushback.

When the church confronts evil—evil at the core of people’s lives, and in world—there is pushback. People say to the pastor, “We wish you wouldn’t talk about ‘those things’—at least, not so much.”

They say to their friends, “I don’t want to hear it. I think I’m doing fine.” They avoid people who are repenting of sin and evil, and changing their behavior out of obedience to Christ.

It is possible to keep a church “safe” for evil: Avoid sensitive areas, keep a façade of niceness, and avoid truth or confrontation. A church like that can be comfortable and popular, but it can also cause people to ask, “What is the point of it all?”

The church becomes relevant when we decide together to confront the core issues of life, with the help of Jesus sitting beside us in worship.

That happens when because we are amazed that Jesus is sitting with us in worship, we aim to read the Bible honestly, hear what the Spirit says, and root out what is impure and destructive.

By the grace of God, we can be honest and real, accepting weaknesses but rooting out evil. We pray about illness, emotional distress, spiritual struggles, and compulsive behavior. We support each other while we fight spiritual battles.

When the church gets below the surface, church might be challenging or even uncomfortable, but it will never be dull. Healthy people will be doing business with God, and even the most troubled will find healing and hope

IV. WE MUST CLAIM THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST! (verse 27)

A. Much of what churches offer can be found in other groups or activities. People make social connections at sports bars, school activities, or the gym. They hang out with friends, in person or online. They seek spirituality through mindfulness or

nature, and they can serve their community with many organizations.

The church offers some of those same things, but the church of Jesus Christ has one thing others do not have: **the power of Jesus, sitting right next to us!**

One time years ago in the Sunbury Church, a deeply troubled young man came into worship. He was living in his parents' basement, unable to function normally as an adult.

A few weeks after he first showed up, he came to me after worship to tell me that, while I had been preaching, he had decided to finally forgive his sister for something she had done to him.

I had not said much in the message about Jesus changing lives. The Spirit of God spoke to him as God's people gathered, and the power and authority of Jesus broke through his resentment and bitterness.

Forgiving his sister was the beginning a breakthrough for the young man, and a few weeks later he was able to move out of his parents' basement into a healthier sheltered environment, where he thrived. He had gone to church and had found Jesus there!!

B. A Jesus-centered church connects us to God, who created and redeemed us for his glory. The church offers the good news of grace and forgiveness, through the cross of Jesus. The church confronts evil in the name of Jesus, initiating people into Jesus' kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The church boldly declares that we are children of God, and joins us unselfishly as the Body of Christ. The church offers the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, to sanctify and transform us into the image of Christ.

In the church, the authority and power of Jesus changes us. We submit to what he says, we confront evil, and we claim the power of Christ to make us his saints.

How do we go to church with Jesus and become amazed by that fact?

We open up to the Word of God, actually expecting to hear from Jesus through the Spirit. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

We invite Jesus to touch our lives, transform us into his image, facing the truth about ourselves, believing in his power to make us what he wants us to be.

Amen? Let Us Pray...