

“Sabbath Teaching”

St. Mark the Evangelist loves to use the word “immediately” (as he does twice here in our Gospel reading for today). It’s his way of telling us to “pay attention!”

Pay attention to what is going on in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus is doing His thing, His ministry, the work His Father has given to Him to do. Jesus comes into the synagogue – into the gathering of people – to teach.

“And immediately (pay attention!) there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.” Jesus comes to teach us to pay attention to this man – because something’s wrong – something is unclean – something has separated him from God – his life is out of order.

What about you who have gathered here into this synagogue (this gathering of people)? Is there something that is out of order for you? Something that separates you from God? Something that has made you unclean, troubling you, burdening you with guilt and shame?

Well, did you pay attention to Jesus and what He was doing? It is an epiphany – a revelation of what God the Son has come to do? The people of the synagogue paid attention, and “they were astonished at [Jesus’] teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority.”

Jesus comes to exercise His authority for the sake of this troubled man – and the people ask – “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” Which leads us to ask – is this a “new teaching” and a “new” authority?” The answer is NO and YES.

NO, it’s not “new.” This is the same old Word of God, as it was “in the beginning.” A Word that does what it says. God speaks, “and it was so” – creating life – creating all things in heaven and on earth. This is the Word of God that speaks and puts all of creation in proper order – in it’s divinely assigned order – so that life is “good.”

And YES, it is “new.” That same Word which created all things has created you – which means that your life is dependent upon that Word. One of the great epiphanies that God reveals to you through His Word – is that His Son has taken on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. This is what is new, and as always, it is for you, for your “good.”

Jesus says, “where two or three are gathered together in my name (gathered around the hearing of His Word), there am I in the midst of them.” You are gathered here today, synagogue-ed, to hear the Word of the Lord – and Jesus is with you.

He is here on this Sabbath day to exercise His authority. By His Word – spoken from His mouth into your ears – He comes with all the authority of God. When the unclean spirits who afflicted the man in our text realized Jesus had come, they cried out – “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” They knew who they were dealing with.

That is the fear that all sinners have when they realize they are in the presence of the Lord God Almighty – they fear He has come to destroy them. I think that is why some people, including Christians, deliberately stay away from church.

But do not fear, He has not come to destroy you – but to rectify that which makes the sinner unclean. When our sinful nature hears the Word of the Lord – we are shaken, convulsed, afraid that we are getting what our sin deserves.

Jesus shakes you by His Word in order to re-create your life – to make all things right again. Your spirit has been made unclean by your rebellion against God and failing to live according to His will. The Scriptures often speak of this as a bad conscience, a darkened mind. You know it as the guilt and shame that you carry around.

Yesterday, at the Walk for Life – there were no doubt many amongst the walkers, and amongst the counter-protesters – who carried the burden of an abortion.

Most of our families here have been impacted by marital troubles in one way or another – whether that be sharp words, physical abuse, divorce, or anything that harms and tears at the bond of marriage. The devil no doubt tempts those who have sinned in this way to believe that God does not love them – that they are cut off from God.

The power struggles that bring chaos to your work environment – the vanity, pride and selfishness that soils your friendships – ALL things that make one unclean – threaten to separate you from God – leaving you to a life of chaos and destruction.

God in the flesh Jesus speaks His Word to lay bare your sins, to shake you – so that He might re-create you. You are not cut off from God – for God Himself comes to you today – to heal you and restore you.

You have heard the living voice of Christ declare, “I forgive you all your sin.” By that forgiveness you are cleansed. All that makes you unclean has been redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ – shed for you on the cross of Calvary, and poured out on you today – so that your life might be made right.

God in the flesh Jesus gives you His very own Body and Blood to re-create your life – to put back into order that which sin has thrown into turmoil. You who have had an abortion, who are divorced – you who speak back to your parents, who lie about your friends and tarnish their reputations – you who are greedy for worldly riches and forsake the treasures of God’s kingdom --- you are forgiven, in Christ Jesus.

Dearly beloved, pay attention! Jesus Christ has made all things right. Nothing stands in the way of a “good” and right relationship with your heavenly Father. The sin that has convulsed your marriage, your family, your own soul – has been taken away – and in its place, Jesus gives you the peace of sins forgiven.

It’s no coincidence that Jesus healed the man with an unclean spirit on the Sabbath day – because whenever Jesus comes into the midst of His people with His gracious forgiveness – there is Sabbath, which means, “rest.”

May the rest you have received from God in the flesh Jesus today – bear good fruit in your lives – leading you to be gracious and forgiving to one another – strengthening you to seek reconciliation which those you are at odds with.

God bless you as He re-orders all things in your life, for your “good.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.