

Scripture:  
Mark 1:21-28

“The people were amazed.”

At the time of Christ in Israel there was THE Temple --- as in the one temple ---- in Jerusalem.

And then there were the Synagogues ---- and there were many many synagogues ----- indeed it was laid down that wherever there were 10 Jewish families there must also be a Synagogue.

The Synagogue was primarily a place for teaching and instruction ---- and a service in the synagogue consisted of basically 3 things --- prayer ---- reading from the scriptures --- and then teaching on the scripture reading.

The Temple on the other hand ----- was a place of sacrifice and of worship.

And as we see in the first verse from our reading in Mark’s gospel today ---- ----- Jesus was in the Synagogue teaching.

“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into to the Synagogue and began to teach.”

In Israel every Synagogue had a Chazzan ---- and the Chazzan was basically responsible for the day to day functioning of the Synagogue ---- including lining up the teachers.

At that time in the Synagogues there wasn’t a regular or full time teacher ---- --- more often than not one of the Scribes would look after the teaching but very often there would be guest teachers.

This is how we come to find Jesus in the Synagogue ----- as a guest teacher on the Sabbath.

So it was a normal ---- usual day in Capernaum ---- it was the Sabbath and everyone gathered in the Synagogue for some teaching.

And on this day there would have likely been a sign indicating that today the teacher was one Jesus --- from the town of Nazareth.

Nothing unusual --- nothing exceptional --- just another day at the Synagogue.

That is of course until Jesus began to speak.

“The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” ----- verse 22 from Mark’s gospel today.

“The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”

The people were amazed because Jesus was totally different from anything they had heard before.

The people were amazed because Jesus had an authority ---- that was totally different from anything they had ever heard before.

The question is ----- how did Jesus’ teaching differ so radically from the other teachers in the synagogue --- why was he so memorable ---- and amazing?

Well clearly ---- first and foremost Jesus had an authority that the people weren’t used to.

And the authority that Jesus had was personal authority.

Personal authority.

As Scottish New Testament scholar Will Barclay says ---- no Scribe ever gave a decision on his own ----- he would always begin with --- “There was a teaching that ...” --- and would then go on to quote all of his authorities --- - his references.

And when a Scribe made a statement they would surround it with quotes from the great legal masters of the past.

As a rule ---- Scribes would never give an independent --- unreferenced judgment or teaching.

And then in steps Jesus ---- doing things differently.

Up into the pulpit He steps and speaks as though He needs no authority beyond Himself.

Up into the pulpit He steps and boldly speaks with utter independence ---- citing no authorities and quoting no experts or masters of the past.

Up into the pulpit He steps speaking with the finality and authority of the very voice of God.

It must have been like a breathe of fresh air when Jesus spoke.

The clear --- concise absolute certainty of Jesus was such a radical departure from the quotations and references from the Scribes that it clearly knocked their socks off.

There was a note of personal authority when Jesus spoke and it captured everyone's attention.

“The people were amazed....”

Clearly something different was happening ---- in the synagogue ----- in Capernaum --- as Jesus taught.

In some regards it was just another Sabbath --- get up --- go the Synagogue - ---- pray --- listen to the scriptures ----- and then the teaching.

But once the preacher spoke --- once Jesus spoke --- it was clear that there was something all together different going on.

And of course there's something we can learn from this too.

Just as there were many different speakers in the Synagogue week by week - ----- and perhaps even day by day ----- so we have many different voices trying to --- “teach us” ----- too.

Our home page ----- even if all it ever really gets is just a quick glance --- is slanted a certain way to try to get us to think or focus on certain things in certain ways.

Advertising ---- road side --- bus side ----- side columns on the web --- on the TV.

The news paper ---- flyers ---- magazines ---- whatever it is we lay our eyes on ---- are all trying to get us to think a certain way.

“You need this”

or

“Buy this and your life will be better ---- you’ll be happier.”

“All the cool kids have one.”

And so on.

The news ----- advertisements ----- most of what we look at isn’t at all indifferent or impartial.

More often than not ----- it’s slanted and suggestive --- at times untrue ----- and sometimes even downright harmful.

And then there is the message of Jesus Christ.

The amazing --- authoritative --- powerful ----- reconciling ----- saving message of Jesus Christ.

According to Mark’s gospel this morning -----

The people were amazed when Jesus spoke.

It’s all too easy for us to get so used to hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ that it becomes rote --- almost watered down in its familiarity.

Instead of something radical --- and new ---- and amazing.

As it was for those that gathered in the synagogue in Mark’s gospel reading today.

There's nothing rote --- or static ----- or ordinary ----- about the Gospel --- and we do it a disservice to tame it and domesticate it.

Think about what we have set before us today --- Communion ---- the Lord's Supper.

Talk about ----- amazing --- and powerful --- and authoritative --- and then some.

And it's all too easy for this too ----- to become rote and familiar --- ordinary ----- losing its power ----- authority --- and saving truth.

“I know little bit of bread --- little bit of wine --- same old --- same old.”

But No.

It's not just same old same old.

It's ---- amazing --- and powerful ---- authoritative ----- and saving.

Some of us may have come to church this morning similar to the way many of those who gathered in the synagogue in Capernaum from Mark's gospel did.

With a sense of familiarity.

Not really expecting anything much to happen.

Wouldn't it be something ----- if that same sense of amazement that those gathered in Capernaum experienced when Jesus spoke ----- happened here today?

And of course it can --- maybe it already has for some.

So Jesus comes into the Synagogue to teach ----- and the people are amazed.

He taught --- as one with authority --- and not just like other teachers.

And picking it up at verse 23 ----- “Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “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!”

Wow ----- talk about an eventful day.

This Jesus from Nazareth ---- probably teaching for the first time there or they might have been more ready for Him --- and less shocked by Him.

This Jesus of Nazareth teaches in the most unusual of ways ---- and then as He does --- someone stands up and 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!”

For sure his was not just another ordinary day at the Synagogue.

But there’s more.

If Jesus’ words left the people amazed --- what He is about to do with the man and the impure spirit ----- will certainly leave them speechless.

Verses 25 and 26 ---- “”Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him.” And the impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.”

As if the amazing --- authoritative ----- never before seen or heard nature and style of Jesus’ teaching wasn’t enough.

As if a possessed man hollering out ---- “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!” ----- wasn’t enough.

Jesus heals the man --- and performs an exorcism ---- casting out a demon.

“Be quiet!” ----- “Come out of him.”

And then the impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

And then picking it up at verse 27 --- “the people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching --- and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”

This is precisely the kind of awe and amazement ---- and wonderment we ought to have from time to time as we consider the reality ---- and the power ----- and influence of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

There’s was nothing rote or ordinary about what happened at the Synagogue in Capernaum in Mark’s gospel today.

“The people were amazed.” --- we’re told --- not once but twice.

We too need to be ready --- and prepare ourselves --- to be amazed and awed --- humbled and astonished by Jesus Christ.

And we have a perfect opportunity today ---- as we approach this table --- doing what Jesus instructed us to do.

“Do this in remembrance of me”

It’s the teaching and the matter of authority that Mark holds up before today.

The teaching and the authority of the teaching.

The teaching and the authority of the teaching was so powerful --- and new -- and radical ----- that it left the people amazed --- astonished.

The teaching and the authority of the teaching was so powerful ---- and new --- and radical ----- that it caused the people to ask ----- “What is this?” --- and then proclaim ---- “A new teaching --- and with authority!”

What Jesus said and did ---- was so new --- and radical ----- and powerful --- - that it caused the people to stop dead in their tracks.

Clearly the people hadn’t seen or experienced anything quite like what they were experiencing with Jesus.

And so it is with us --- or at least ought to be.

We too ought to be amazed --- and stopped dead in our tracks ----- by the teachings and doing of Christ.

We too ought to consider what Jesus has done and continues to do and realize that there isn't anything else in all of creation quite like Him.

Jesus wasn't just another teacher among teachers at the Synagogue.

It may have started out looking that way at the beginning of the day ---- but before long things changed.

Eyes ----- ears ---- hearts --- minds ---- and spirits ---- had been opened and amazed ----- and it soon became very clear that something completely different was going on.

So it ought to be with us.

Jesus isn't just another teacher among many teachers --- He is the Christ --- Lord and Saviour.

Perhaps today isn't just another day.

Perhaps today we might find ourselves opened up to Christ in new and in different ways than ever before.

“The people were amazed.”

May we too allow ourselves to be amazed by Jesus.

The one who gives new teachings ----- and does so with Divine authority.

Amen.