

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany, February 1, 2009, Year B

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Mark 1:21-28

"The WORD - Revealed"

As many of you may know, my Aunt Kay, Kathleen Beenders, whom we have been praying for these last several months in our prayer list in the Sunday Bulletin, went home to be with the Lord last Friday. We traveled to New Jersey, for her wake and funeral, through JFK Airport in New York, an adventure to be sure. On our way there on Tuesday, we had to board the "Sky Train" from Jet Blue terminal 5, to go and get our car rental. I was dressed in my clerics, since we were heading to the Funeral Home. On board the train an older couple from Fort Worth asked me if I was an Episcopal Priest, and I told them I had been and was now gladly and gratefully Anglican. They shared with me some of their troubles attending the Cathedral in Fort Worth, and how they were depending on the Lord to see them through. I prayed for them and gave them the Lord's blessing before we got off at our stop. Sitting by the door was a rather interesting fellow – I would say that he was rather "wild eyed." He told me that they should just as well pray to the dinosaur on the ceiling that he prays to every night. The dinosaur on the ceiling! My reaction to him was not one of rebuke, but instead to assure him that God was watching out for Him, but that he had to do what he felt best. We prayed for him on the way to the car. His thoughts and his heart are most certainly somewhere else. Of course we saw this as a direct correlation to today's Holy Gospel reading from Mark, in which Jesus is confronted in the synagogue of Capernaum. Isn't it funny how God works that way?

We find Jesus teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum. Turn with me to page 994 of your Pew Bibles. Verse 22 *"They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."* Jesus spoke God's Word with authority, power and hope for those who were present that Sabbath day. Jesus in such a way that the people could sense His authority – different from the scribes who usually taught *about* the authority of God Himself – present from the beginning of time. John the Baptist reminded the world of the promise of healing, strength, and forgiveness that would come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, and how that promise would affect their lives: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* (Mark 1:15)

Present that day in the synagogue of Capernaum was the Word of God – teaching God's message of forgiveness and salvation, in such a way that you felt the assurance with every Word – and rightly so. Please turn with me to page 1058, John 1:1-5: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."* Present that day in the synagogue of Capernaum was not only authority – but THE AUTHORITY – the Creator of the Universe – the Light of the World! There was no avoiding it – the WORD of God had been revealed; Incarnate and written!

When light shines – what happens? Things that are hidden in the darkness are revealed. That day, present in the synagogue of Capernaum, was a person who was among them that was carrying a secret; one that was well hidden. When the light of truth was present that day – the darkness inside that man was revealed – and he spoke to Jesus *"What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!"* And Jesus rebuked him, saying, *"Be quiet, and come out of him!"* Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him."

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(Mark 1:24-26) Similar words can be found in the Gospel of Luke regarding this same man and this same incident: *"Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!"*

(Luke 4:34-35) The Term *"Holy One"* was reserved to be used referring to God Himself – used 56 times in the Scriptures – in the Old Testament referring solely to God Almighty, and in the New Testament referring to God in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son.

In the presence of God Himself, this demoniac could do nothing but speak the truth - the Light of the world revealing the truth about Himself. This man, who was apparently not a known demoniac – or he would not have been allowed in the synagogue, revealed Jesus' true identity to the world – Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God. Satan had been working from within the synagogue was now going to try to thwart Jesus' teaching – but the WORD revealed the Truth! It makes you wonder how long this evil had been infiltrating the synagogue, working from within - until the WORD revealed the truth. **Jesus' cast out the spirit – but not the man.** You see **God hates the sin – but loves the sinner!** There is hope and forgiveness for those who know and love God's WORD – incarnate and written.

A similar incident occurred when Jesus encountered the two demon possessed men in the Gadarenes, on the shore of the Galilee. When in the presence of Jesus, the Word revealed – they could do nothing else but proclaim the truth: Please turn to Matthew 8:29 on page 965: *"They cried out "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"*" And when Jesus met the man possessed by the demons named "Legion" in the Gerasenes, a similar truth was heard: *"What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me."*(Luke 8:28) When in the presence of light – darkness cannot help but reveal the truth!

How sad it is for those who do not know the WORD; for those who do not seek Him; for those who reject Him or seek other gods – like the dinosaur on the ceiling, or worse – those who deny His existence at all. In the Book of Revelation 19:12-13, more light is shed on the identity of Jesus: *"He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God."* Jesus was hope for that man in the synagogue and He is hope for each one of us today!

How wonderful it was last Sunday at the 11:15 service, with Bishop Duncan here, and each one of us, along with the 18 Candidates for Confirmation and reception, renewing our Baptismal vows – and renouncing evil; being equipped and prepared as disciples of Christ! Thanks be to God – through knowing and staying in the WORD - we can live in hope as victors over evil and death: *"thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1Corinthians 15:57) Because of the WORD revealed – and the light that comes from Him, we can recognize the darkness, and with His help - we can stand against it.

The world today is virtually infested with darkness – it is everywhere – and with the light of His WORD revealed to us – we can see it, and we can pray against it. Think for a minute, if you will, of some of the movies that deal with darkness – either through victory or struggle against it. Evil, in effect is glamorized – with attention drawn to it, and in some cases made enticing. The list is long but not exclusive to: The Exorcist, End of Days, The Matrix, Devil's Advocate, To Kill a Mockingbird. And you just know it is present as well in Harry Potter movies, The Lord of the Rings, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, and all of the Chronicles of Narnia, The Return of the Jedi – and all of the Star Wars Saga. Please understand that I am not

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condemning any of these movies, some of them I rather like, I am just simply saying that the struggle is quite evident. In many, the light is victorious over the “dark side,” but unfortunately not in all.

Forgive me, but it is not just the media, the movies, or TV. I want you to listen to this quote: **“There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”** This is a sign that is appearing on buses all over Toronto. An organization called **“Freethought Association of Canada”** has purchased these signs, following in the footsteps of others who have had successful campaigns in the UK, Washington, D.C., Barcelona, and Madrid. There are countless others waiting to do the same in Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, and other cities in the US.

A young Christian college student, named Steven, decided to respond to this organization by courageously writing: "I am appalled by this action. I DO NOT challenge the freedom of expression, instead I do support it as it forms part of our equality and liberty, but the wording of these advertisements have brought controversy because of the message behind it. To eliminate the thought of God from the minds of citizens ultimately removes the basis of where our morality has arisen from. Who then, could one ask, decides the difference between good and evil? The message provided here is damaging to this society, and damaging to the youth of this generation and the generations to come." He goes on to say: “Our counter-claim is simply this: **“THERE IS A GOD!”** This nation was founded on the Christian Faith of which now slowly slips away, our nation is losing touch from its spiritual roots and origins of which was truth. Ever since the study and inclusion of God was taken out of schools there has been an ever increasing problem of youth issues such as drugs, violence, etc. etc. These problems obviously existed before hand but the great increase of issues did not occur until the study and inclusion of God was removed from our education systems and institutions.”

“WHO IS THIS GOD? We speak of the Christian God, the only living God, the God who created the heavens and earth by simply speaking it into existence. We speak and proclaim the truth of a God who sent His one and only son, Jesus Christ, into this world to die for all our sins, out of love for us, and who was raised from the dead on the third day to open for us a path of victory through Him.”

“We speak and proclaim a God who is also recognized as the Holy Trinity: - God the Father; - God the Son; - God the Holy Spirit.”

It would seem to me that this young man has heard the truth, and the truth has set him free; free to help spread God’s WORD to others.

So how do we battle this evil; this flood of lies that some people want to perpetuate? What is the answer? The answer is indeed God’s WORD revealed. To borrow a phrase from our friends from Petra, it is time to **“Get on your knees and fight like a man!”** Indeed we are to be prayer warriors in this battle which belongs to the Lord. There is indeed a battle going on – and we cannot fight it alone. With God’s strength; with God’s truth and with God’s WORD – we can help to shed the light of His Truth upon the darkness – and the truth will be victorious. As faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, through our obedience to prayer, obedience to His WORD, and in being an instrument, helping to see the WORD revealed to others - hearts will be changed, minds will be opened, and souls will be won for the Kingdom of God!