January 28, 2024 **POWER TO DO**

In our passage for this Sunday St. Mark 1:21-28, we understand Jesus drives out the spirit of evil and fills it with a spirit of love. It was remarkable and even miraculous. The first chapter of Mark describes the start of Jesus’ ministry by John the Baptizer baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan. After his baptism Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, where Satan tempted him. When Jesus returned victoriously, he invited Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. Jesus went into a synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them with authority.

What is a synagogue? There is a basic difference between the synagogue and the Temple, as we know it today. The synagogue was primarily a teaching institution. The synagogue service consisted of only three things: (1).Prayer (2) Reading of God’s word and (3) the exposition of the word. There is no music or singing, and no sacrifice. It may be said the Temple was the place of worship and sacrifice: the synagogue is the place of teaching and instruction.

The Jewish law laid down the rules for every ten Jewish families there should be one synagogue. If a person wants to preach a new message, synagogue is the best place to preach. The synagogue had a ruler, who was responsible for administration of the service. Daily collection will be taken in cash and in kind and they are distributed to the poor by the distributor as alms. The poor were given fourteen meals per week. There was another person who was called as Minister; he was responsible for the Scripture and scrolls. The synagogue did not have a permanent preacher or teacher.

When a synagogue service is going on the ruler will call on any competent person to give the address and the exposition. That is why Jesus was able to open his ministry in the synagogue. Jesus was known to be a man with messages and for that very reason the synagogue of every community provided the pulpit. When Jesus did teach in the synagogue the whole method and atmosphere of his teaching was like a new revelation.

The Scribes are experts in the laws. They had three main duties to fulfill. They extract rules and regulations for every possible situation in life. Jewish religion with great moral laws and it ended with an infinity of rules and regulations. It began as religion; it ended as legalism. (2) The task of the scribes was to transmit and to teach this law and its developments. These oral laws are more binding than the written law. They are committed to memory. (3) The scribes had the duty of giving judgment in individual cases. Every individual case had a new law.

Jesus’ teaching differs so much from the teaching of the scribes. He taught with personal authority. The scribes always used to compare the teachings and quote examples. But when Jesus spoke, he spoke as if he needed no authority beyond himself. He spoke with independence. He cited no authorities and quoted no experts. He spoke with the finality of the voice of God. To the people it was like a breeze from heaven to hear someone speak like that. The positive certainty of Jesus was very different from the scribes.

In the synagogue there was a man in the grip of unclean spirit. He created a disturbance and Jesus healed him. Jesus’ teaching draws admiration and attack. A man suddenly cried out, “What have you to do with Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you are the holy one of God.”  The gospel tells us the story in such a way that the man is already identified as having an unclean spirit. The writer knows the event and writes, let us imagine about the new disciples who have been just called fishers of men. Jesus diagnosed the man. He knew he was possessed. He commanded the spirit to come out of the man, and the spirit came out of the man. If you would like to learn more about Jesus’ ministry, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 1:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

West Center Congregational Church

101 Pondfield Road West

Bronxville, NY 10708