

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany, February 1, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:21-28

“The WORD - Revealed”

It is great to be back with our parish family – we missed y'all greatly! Although we did have a marvelous time celebrating three birthdays. When we got to Germany it was Andrew's birthday on the 20th, Essey John's FIRST birthday on the 23rd, and we celebrated Theresa's birthday early, which is Valentine's Day – and Dad made dinner, so that was fun!

It brought to mind, with all of the traveling and all of the airports, which can be kind of tiring but it can also open your eyes to some things that are going on in the world. Several years ago, my Aunt Kay, my Dad's sister went home to be with the Lord. We traveled from Buffalo to New Jersey, for her wake and funeral, through JFK Airport in New York, an adventure to be sure. On our way there, we had to board the “Sky Train” from Jet Blue terminal 5, to go and get our car rental. We are on this elevated train that makes many stops and takes you to Jamaica. I was dressed in my clerics, since we were heading directly 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; something that this congregation knows quite well, as other congregations that have joined the Anglican Church in North America, traveling through the desert, through the wilderness, ending up in what we believe is the Promised Land. Well, I prayed for them right on the train and gave them the Lord's blessing before we got off at our stop. Sitting by the door was a rather interesting fellow – I honestly have to tell you 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, (that seemed like a new idea to him) but I told him 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. I saw this as a direct correlation to today's Holy Gospel reading from the evangelist John 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, right in the midst of this fisherman's village. 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. In John 1:1-5 the Evangelist writes *“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 you go into a dark room and turn on the light – what happens? You see what you couldn't see. Suddenly, 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. He sat among them! I must tell you that in that synagogue in Capernaum, the people didn't sit in the middle in pews but around the perimeter. They sat looking at each other and at the teacher. 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.” (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 specifically reserved to be used referring to God Himself – and it is used 56 times in the Scriptures – in the Old Testament referring solely to Adonai - 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. When light is shone upon darkness everything is revealed; when the truth is shown in the darkness you cannot hide; the Light of the world revealing the truth about Himself. This man, who was apparently not a known demoniac, he was not sitting out in the town square – 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 and was now going to try to thwart Jesus' teaching – but the WORD, the light of the world 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 – this is very, very important for all of us to know and to take to heart. Jesus cast out the demon **but did not cast out the man**. You see **God hates the sin – but loves the sinner!** That is every one of us – there is nothing that cannot be covered by the Blood of Jesus! 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 eastern shore of the Galilee – the pagan side of the lake – where the raised

pigs. You would not find pigs being raised on the Jewish side of the lake. When in the presence of Jesus, the Word revealed – they could do nothing else but proclaim the truth: Matthew 8:29 says: *“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. We heard this morning that there are other gods – created by man, but there is only One True God! Maybe they are talking to 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 is to be present at a baptism or Confirmation (please Lord we will have that on the 29th of November, when our Bishop visits) during which we renew our Baptismal vows – and renouncing evil; being equipped and prepared as disciples of Jesus 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, even The Return of the Jedi – and all of the Star Wars Saga. Please understand that I am not condemning any of these movies, some of them I rather like, I am just simply saying that the struggle between good and evil 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 appeared on buses all over Toronto. We lived up north about an hour or so from Toronto, and we were about 10 minutes from the Canadian border. This is an organization called **“Freethought Association of Canada”** purchased these signs, following in the footsteps of others who have had successful campaigns in the UK, Washington, D.C., Barcelona, and

Madrid. Countless others had lined up 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." Steven 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, guns, bombs, assault weapons etc. etc. These problems obviously existed well 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 the sins of all mankind, 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. Did you know that those words, John 8:32, are encircling the Compass Rose – the symbol of the Anglican Communion, in Greek? John 8:32 *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free!"* What happens when you walk into a darkness and you turn on a light? All is revealed! You are given new eyes!

So how do we battle 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 some dear friends of mine – you may have heard of them. They are the Christian band called Petra; they are dear friends of mine and they have a song that says **"Get on your knees and fight like a man!"** We are all called to be prayer warriors in this battle which belongs to the Lord. There is a battle going on – we are witnessed of that - 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 His truth will be victorious. As faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, through our obedience to prayer, obedience to His Holy WORD, and in being an instrument, helping to see the WORD revealed to others - hearts can be changed, minds will be opened, and souls will be won for the Kingdom of God! Amen? Amen!