

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Epiphany 4

Quincy, IL

Saturday, January 30, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Rev. Stephen Southward

Sunday, January 31, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“We Are Committed To The Power of God”

Mark 1: 21-28

If you make a commitment to someone, what does that mean to you? The concept of commitment in our society is starting to take on a completely new meaning. To many, a commitment means that I have penciled you in, but I may have to cancel if something better comes along. But the word commitment means a pledge, promise or obligation. When you commit yourself to something, you are bound emotionally or intellectually to carry through with what you have pledged or promised. The city of Tampa Bay Florida is committed to the NFL that they would be the host city for the Super Bowl in a couple of weeks. I would imagine that they had to sign a contract a number of years ago pledging to the league that they would not back out but would be the hosts regardless of what happens. Now when we talk about commitment, one of the best examples is that of marriage. When a man and woman get married, they make a commitment to each other. They pledge and bind themselves to be faithful to their husband or wife no matter what. In other words, each one says to the other, “I am not going to run when times get tough. I am binding myself to stay with you in good times and in bad and be devoted completely to you.”

That is what commitment means. It is not only a promise of words, but it is followed by actions. This evening/morning, we take this concept of commitment and bring it into our relationship with God. What is our commitment to God? We

know very well God's commitment to us. In Eden, God bound himself to sending a Savior to rescue us from sin and to destroy the power of the devil. That was a promise or pledge that God made to his people. Now we just celebrated Christmas a little over a month ago that celebrated God keeping his commitment to us by sending his own Son to do what he had promised. God not only spoke the words of promise, he followed through with actions. In view of God's commitment to us then, we want to reflect and meditate tonight/today on our commitment to God, especially to his Word and his power and their continued role in our lives. As we see the divine power and authority revealed in Jesus, both in his words and in his works, we are strengthened in our commitment to him. We have confessed that we believe that in Jesus alone is found all the power and strength that we need to live our Christian lives.

We have stated that it is the Holy Spirit working through God's Word alone that can move hearts to faith and produce fruits of faith in the lives of his people. So do we show that commitment in our lives? Confidently, we confess that we are Committed To The Power Of God. And we will see how this has big implications for us as we go through our lives and carry out our ministry. Now we see from the words of our Gospel lesson that news about Jesus spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. And we see two incidents that give testimony to the power and authority of Jesus. We see it first in Jesus teaching at the synagogue on the Sabbath day. It was customary to let traveling teachers teach at the synagogue on the Sabbath, so this would be nothing new for the people. But when Jesus taught, the people took notice. This was a different teacher. He did not quote the church fathers that had gone before him to give authority to his words. He did not focus on the laws or rules that the teachers of the law typically talked about on and on. The scribes who usually spoke left the souls of their listeners feeling depressed and empty. But this was not the case with Jesus.

He taught as one with authority. What he shared with the people was pure divine truth. Now that word authority can be used in different ways. Here it refers especially to the power of the message that Jesus preached. It moved them. We don't know exactly the contents of the sermon that day, but we can

assume from the other times that Jesus spoke that it was a personal message that pointed the people to their sins and then to God's answer for their sins in the Messiah. This was the power of Jesus words. They moved people. They amazed and astonished the people. They took notice that this was no ordinary preacher before them. He came with power and authority. And then Jesus had the opportunity to give further testimony to his power and authority. A demon who possessed one of the men in the synagogue that day recognized who Jesus was. I won't spend a whole lot of time this evening/morning talking about demon possession. But just let me say that demon possession was one tool that the devil often used in the days of Jesus to try to lead people away from God. It isn't a tool that he uses as much today, though we don't deny that it happens from time to time. But the main focus of this portion of Scripture is not on the demon itself, but on Jesus power and authority over the demon. Even the demon had to acknowledge who Jesus is.

He is the Holy One of God. The demon said. Now Jesus was not trying to deny this in telling the demon to be quiet, but he did not accept the testimony of the demon about himself. The demon was not a proper witness to Jesus. Jesus was not yet ready to fully reveal himself as the Messiah. Notice here the power that Jesus displayed over the demon. All that he needed to do was speak, and the demon was forced to obey. As we see this incident, we see the supreme power of Jesus, that he could speak and his command had to be obeyed. Though the demon tried one last time to hurt the man whose body he had occupied, he had no choice but to leave. We see here that Jesus gives us a glimpse into the wonderful truth that he has the absolute authority over all things. Jesus rules over all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And he is Lord and master of the demons too. Now we see in this account that Jesus gave undeniable evidence that he was indeed the Holy One of God who came into the world to destroy the works of the devil and to deliver all people from the bondage of Satan. This victory over Satan here is just a foretaste of the crushing blow that he would deliver on Calvary's cross and the final defeat that he will bring on the last day.

This incident had the immediate affect of strengthening the new disciples that Jesus had just called. Now in the last few weeks, our Gospel lessons have focused on the calling of Jesus disciples. This account takes place right on the heels of calling Andrew and Peter and James and John to be his disciples. Imagine the affect this had on them. They had left everything that they had to follow Jesus. They had committed themselves to being his disciples. And to strengthen them in their commitment, Jesus gave them a glimpse of his power and authority. Here Jesus shows them that their loyalties are not in vain. He is God's Son, the Messiah, who holds all power and glory over everything, even the devil himself. But what about us? Are we strengthened as we are given witness to the power and authority of Jesus as God's son? Are we strengthened in our commitment to follow this Jesus? Scripture talks not only here, but of many other places of the power and authority that Jesus holds as our Savior. He has the power to forgive sins. He has the power to heal people of their diseases.

He has the power to change water into wine. He has the power to send the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts and minds of people. He has the power through his Word to build up his people and strengthen them. Perhaps we know and acknowledge this power that Jesus holds. We confess him to be not only our Savior, but the Lord of our lives. But are we committed to that power? Do our actions give testimony to the fact that we are bound to the words and power of Jesus for our spiritual lives and our lives of faith? Do we recognize this divine authority in our own lives? Here is why I ask this question. So often we find ourselves scratching and searching for comfort and peace in our lives as we face the challenges and hardships of life in this sinful world. We confess that Jesus has the power to sustain us in difficult times. But do we sit down daily with the Prince of Peace who sends the Spirit through his Word and promises to bring us the peace that we so desperately need? Do you see the disconnect? We talk about God's power to sustain us through his Word, but is that where we turn? Do we trust that he will work through his Word to bring us peace?

We search for ways to solve the problems that we face in life. And often, the solution that we come up with is to take matters into our own hands and find our own way through the problem. But do we first take those problems to our Lord, who has the power to speak so that even demons obey him? We have a friend or relative or neighbor who needs to hear the love of Jesus and so we try to convince them to come to church. And the whole focus of our conversation is on church. But if we believe that Jesus words have the power to change hearts and lives, do we sit down and share God's Word and let Jesus power do the work? And it is the same thing with our church. We want the church to grow and put our faith in every method and program around. So we trust our own methods and plans and fail to rely on the power and authority of Jesus. Where is our commitment to God's power? But I wonder, have we lost sight of God's power and authority to change and move hearts through his Word? Do we trust that if more people hear God's word more often he will produce more fruits of faith through that? So how committed are we to the power and authority of God's Word working in the hearts and lives of his people?

When we talk about commitment, the first place that we should be talking about is our commitment to the Word and power of Jesus. If I have committed myself to season tickets for my favorite team, then I am going to make sure that I am at every game. Many years ago I committed to coach a 5th and 6th grade baseball team lwhen I was at seminary in St. Louis. I said I would be there for the kids and do the best job I could to help the team get better. The team finished 8 and 4 and the kid got better with each game. If I am committed to a Savior who has rescued me from hell, if I am committed to his power and authority that is his alone and can overcome demons and Satan himself, then I am going to be where he acts, in his Word. The biggest question before us in our ministry is this, "How can we get more people into God's Word more often?" God has committed himself to us. God has committed to use his power and authority for the benefit of his church.

So what is our commitment to the power of his Word? Frankly, not being in his house, not making Bible study a priority shows a lack of commitment on our part. It displays a lack of trust that God has the power and authority in his Word to

move my heart and direct my actions. Now I would like to share this illustration I found that I believe to be true. A person who says he or she believes in God but doesn't go to church is like a person who says they believe in education but won't go to school. Yes, my friends, we have committed God's Word to our minds. Let us then commit it also to our lives. And as we are made aware of our sins and shortcomings, we are thankful for the power that Jesus displayed over death and the devil.

This victory over the devil here is only a foretaste of the victory that he would win at Calvary. There Jesus took our sins to the cross, and with his power he overcame hell itself, and then rose from the grave. God kept his commitment to take care of our sins. They are gone forever from our sight. Death and hell no longer hold any power over us. At our baptism, God confirmed his commitment to us. When we partake of the Lord's Supper we see the power and authority of Jesus words when we receive Christ's body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine. We also then receive the blessings of the assurance of our sins being forgiven, the assurance of his love for us, and the assurance of our salvation. In view of all this, we are now reminded of our commitment to hear the Word and to spread the Word. It is important that we not lose sight of the mission, our mission, to teach God's people the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And in that mission, we focus on our commitment to God's power and authority to carry out that work. As Paul proclaimed to the Philippians, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Phil. 2:13) Since our ability and awareness in all things, our Christian lives, ministry included, comes from God, let us then recommit ourselves to the power and authority of his Word. God has the power to do what he wants to do. He will work through his Word to move hearts to faith and to move hearts of faith to service and to action. And confident of this, we are committed to God's power, not only with our minds, but in our hearts and lives as well. I praise God that this is so for us all.

IN JSUS NAME. AMEN!