

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Epiphany 4
Saturday, January 27, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, January 28, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Holy One of God”

Mark 1:21-28

After calling the disciples, one of the first events of Jesus public ministry is this confrontation with the demon or demons who are possessing this man from Capernaum. And the demon speaking announces his knowledge that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Does this strike you as being strange? Do the demons have faith?

No, the demons have knowledge, but they do not have faith. There is a great difference. Thus far in this Epiphany season, this season where Jesus is revealed as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Holy One of God, in our Gospel readings, we have witnessed the calling of the disciples. We heard Jesus say to Philip, Andrew, Peter, James, and John, “Follow Me.” We heard Philip say to Nathanael, “Come and see.” Upon meeting Jesus and hearing Him, Nathanael confesses his faith saying to Jesus, “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

These men confessed their faith with no greater words than that which the demons spoke. So what is the difference? The difference is in motivation. The

disciples confess their understanding of Jesus as the Son of God out of faith and devotion to God. The demons recognize the authority of the Lord out of fear.

These unclean spirits knew that Jesus Christ would come. They had heard it from the angels. They had heard it from the prophets. They knew the Word of God. They knew that their destruction and eternal condemnation was imminent. Their judgment had already taken place. They were cast out of heaven like lightning, Jesus says. And they are awaiting their final sentencing.

So the demons question the Lord about His purpose in being there. Was He there to destroy them? “This is sooner than we thought it would be,” essentially the demon is saying. Of course, Jesus was not there to bring final judgment immediately, but His presence on earth was for the purpose of destroying sin, death, and the power of the devil. Final victory over those enemies was the reason for Christ’s life – and death – and life again.

The demons in Capernaum knew that their days were numbered. They knew Jesus had come with purpose. And they recognized His authority. The words of St. Paul are true, “Every knee shall bow in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Even the demons must recognize this truth. “You are the Holy One of God.” Every person will, at some point, recognize the truth. The only question is, will that confession come before it is too late? A confession from fear on Judgment Day will do no more good than the demon’s confession in Capernaum.

That ship will have sailed.

We have a confession of faith motivated by our love of the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit who creates these words of thankfulness and praise. For as Christ our Lord said, “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” Each Saturday or Sunday as we gather, we confess our faith in the words of the creed, in the liturgy, in the hymns, in our receiving Christ’s Body and Blood. Our fellowship at the Lord’s altar is a statement of faith in what we believe – that this is the true Body and true Blood of our Lord which bestows forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Christ’s presence at Capernaum was much like His presence in the Sacrament. For those who recognize Him as the Son of God, His promise of a broken body and shed blood granted life and salvation. But for those like the demons who might have some knowledge, but no faith, Christ’s presence brings only destruction and judgment.

This is why the church has always taken such care and concern to instruct its members prior to their receiving the Sacrament. Because, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 11, you can eat and drink judgment upon yourself if you refuse to examine yourself (that is, if you refuse to recognize your sin – that is, if you declare your sin to not be sin – if you declare that which God says is evil to be good, how can that sin be forgiven?), or if you do not recognize the body of the Lord, Paul says these gifts of body and blood are no longer gifts but stand in judgment against

you. So because we actually love the people who join us and come into our midst, we take the time to instruct them before receiving the Sacrament to help make sure they do no spiritual harm out of ignorance.

Unfortunately, I must have overslept on the day at Seminary when the professors taught us how to look into someone's heart and know what they believe. Everything would be so much simpler if only I had been taught how to do that. Obviously, no one can do that except for God Himself. Therefore, we must rely upon the confession of faith – the words that come out of the mouth. As Jesus says, "From the overflow of the mouth the heart speaks."

Christ is the Savior and Christ is the Judge. For God's faithful children who confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, Jesus brings peace and comfort to a troubled soul. But for those who do not know or trust God, are unwilling to examine themselves, or don't think that God has any business in their personal lives, for them Jesus brings only fear and judgment. That fear and judgment may not become realized until the Last Day, but every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

For Satan and the demons, their judgment is secure. They have no hope. But we have a great hope. Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. He is the only hope for this world. He is our Savior. He is our Redeemer. He is the Holy One of God. And by the grace of God, we have been called to make this confession in faith. Amen.