



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 4, 2018

Scaring the "Hell" Out of You (Hope Restored Series)

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We continue our sermon series on the Gospel of Mark with the theme of Hope Restored. We all at times need hope restored.

When you saw my sermon title, "Scaring the Hell Out of You," you may have thought I was going to talk about the false missile crisis we had on Jan 13. No.

Today's Scripture passage gives us an assurance that in following Jesus, we are in good hands.

Imagine right now you're in that place and time in today's reading.

Mark 1:21 Jesus and His disciples went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

Imagine being in the synagogue. What do the people look like? How are they dressed? How many of them are they? What does the room look like in an ancient synagogue? Hot day? Cool day? You decide. Where are you sitting? Pause and reflect. Who are you in the story? One of the regular attendees? The rabbi? A helper in the synagogue, an elder, one of Jesus' disciples? Pick one.

It is the Sabbath Day, a special weekly holy day. And who should walk in but Jesus of Nazareth!

You might not know much about Him. You might have heard He is a rabbi. He is from the small town of Nazareth, and it's not a very special town.

But then He begins to teach. Hebrew tradition is that they let people other than the main rabbi come in and teach at times. He probably read something from the Holy Scriptures, the Torah, but then began to teach on it. Nice to hear a new teacher. But then something amazing happens.

Mark 1:22 The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

The writer of the gospel says they were amazed because of His authority. How does one show amazement? Maybe their eyes got big. They're staring more intently. There is a look of incredulity.

When Jesus talked, it may be that people were elbowing each other as if to say listen to this guy! He teaches so differently. He's not like all of the *usual* teachers. He's not even like the *guest* teachers we have heard before. No, this one is different.

But notice it does not say that what caught their attention was that Jesus was so articulate or that He was so inspiring or that He was so clever or funny or knowledgeable. No, what caught their attention was that Jesus spoke with such *AUTHORITY*. He was teaching as if his right to reach was delegated from someone higher than He. He talked as if he really believed the Holy Scriptures to be all true.

He had authority because it was as if He was the author. He wasn't teaching

ABOUT God but rather about Himself, as if HE WERE GOD. When one teaches with authority it means, "Do this! And I have the right to tell you to do this."

Have you ever witnessed that? If an Admiral tells a sailor to do something, the sailor does it because the Admiral has authority. If a lieutenant, on behalf of an Admiral, tells a captain to do something, and that Lieutenant has the full authority of an Admiral to communicate that command, then the captain is compelled to do it.

But if someone dresses like an Admiral and has four stars on his uniform, looks like an Admiral and sounds like an Admiral but is not an Admiral, then he has no authority. He's just wearing a Halloween costume. It is fake authority.

Eight years ago during a worship service, I had announced that President Obama was visiting us that morning. A man walked in, and it sure looked like the President and sounded like the president. Many of you from afar, maybe way in the back of the room thought it was really him. But was it? Let's go back in the archives and look at that so-called historical moment. (Video of the fake-President's visit to First Prez was shown.)

He looked like President Obama. He sounded like President Obama, but he was not the President. He did not have the authority of the President of the United States.

You can normally tell when someone is fake, even if they look the part.

But you can also tell if a person has authority when he or she talks about a certain subject or has a certain position. And that is what the people felt on that day in the synagogue in Capernaum. When Jesus spoke, the people were incredulous. This guy Jesus—He talks like He knows what He is talking about.

But what's the real test of authority? You can say you are a policeman, but if you can't arrest anyone, then you probably aren't. You can say you are a surgeon, but if you can't perform surgery then you aren't. You can say you are a military general, but if you can't order soldiers to do things, then you probably aren't. The proof of the authority is when you see someone DO something. Actions prove whether what you say is really true.

So, Jesus is in the synagogue. You are there listening to Him, and you and your friends think, "Hey, this guy really talks like He really knows what He is talking about."

But then, some Debbie Downerstein (some Debbie Downer) in the synagogue says, "Yeah, well He might talk good, but I don't know. I am not sure of any visible evidence of his authority."

But then, something happens that changes the Debbie and Donnie's world! Your normal day in the synagogue is turned upside down because in walks a demoniac, a human possessed by demons! In the Greek, the original New Testament written language, the words are *Pneuma akatharton*, which is literally a man overcome with *pneuma* – spirits that are *akatharton* supernatural, evil. Let's read the next verse of today's passage:

Mark 1:23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,

Oh, now this day in the synagogue is really going to take off! This is not some actor coming in as a president. No, this is a real live person overcome with evil

spirits! The Gospel of Luke reports this same story but actually calls evil spirit *Daimonion*, or in English, demon, a spirit that can overcome humans, sometimes control them, oppress them.

Okay, wait, NOW we will see if Jesus truly has authority. Anyone can talk the talk, anyone can read the Word of God, but can Jesus walk the walk? A proof of authority is the ability to fight a supernatural enemy. Does this Jesus really have the power, the command, the supremacy, the influence, the clout, the jurisdiction, the authority to tell evil spirits what to do?

Stay tuned until next week for what happens next because this is only a ten-minute sermon since it's SuperBowl Sunday! Ha ha, just kidding! No, we are not going to let a secular high holy day of football stop us. With authority I say No, we will not stop, but move on with the story. So a man with an evil spirit walks into the Synagogue and the evil spirit in him says:

Mark 1:24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

Mark 1:25 "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!"

Mark 1:26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

Mark 1:27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey Him."

There you have it. Jesus scared the "hell" out of him. Early on in Jesus ministry we see some amazing things. Jesus gets baptized and God the Father speaks out a blessing on Him, and the Holy Spirit falls on Him. Then He begins to preach saying the Kingdom of God is at hand. The Messiah is here!

Time for the "purple space," as Pastor Steve preached last week—the merging of the Kingdom of God intersecting with the Kingdom of humankind. It's not "Miller time;" it's "Jesus time!" The now and the not-yet of the Kingdom of God has come! It's Purple Time! But anyone can shriek and yell, "You are the holy one of God!" You can be in a mental ward and say that. But very early on, the Gospel writer Mark is saying this Jesus is different. He has authority!

We have the physical world and the spiritual world. In the physical world we see, touch, and smell things. In the spiritual world we don't always see touch, smell things. In the spiritual world are good beings like the Holy Spirit and angels, but then there are also the bad beings, like the bad angels, the demons.

Some interpret certain Bible verses as saying that one third of all of the millions of angles God created has gone against Jesus. One third. That's a lot of demonic activity. But you don't need to worry. Wait till the end of the talk to see why.

Now we in so-called civilized America don't always believe in things we cannot see. We are educated, sophisticated, cool, holy hipsters.

The only devils we believe in are sports teams, like the Duke University Blue Devils or the Arizona State Sun Devils. There's also the baseball team Tampa Bay Devil Rays, which dropped the "Devil" part of its name in 2007. Then a year later in 2008 they promptly made it to the World Series! (Duh!) Talk about oppression and then healing. Gee, there is a God!

But the real world is made up of the physical and the spiritual, and in both worlds, sorry, you sophisticated people, there are good and bad parties. The good news is that Jesus rules in both the physical and the spiritual. He has authority in both. And when things of the spiritual world bother us, we can call on Jesus' name for help because He has authority over those things.

We may think the SuperBowl is a big thing. In many ways, it is a big event. But whether the Patriots win or the Eagles, it doesn't matter in terms of good versus evil. It's just entertainment. It is not about justice. It is not about healing. It is not about helping those in pain and distress, though it may be about giving people concussions.

Today's passage is more of a real SuperBowl for it is a clash of real evil spirits and Jesus. I could probably preach on this one passage for weeks because there are so many elements in it. But let me give you the short version.

1) There are evil spirits in this world.

All throughout the Bible it is clear that this is a spiritual battle. The battlefield is not only in the invisible world but also here on earth. In reality, there are spiritual ISIS, who are after us all the time. Remember what the Apostle Paul told us in the Bible. He told us this:

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

When I preached two weeks ago, what was it about? Jesus goes into the wilderness to fight Satan. Jesus believes in Satan and demons. So should we. In this world, ultimately, eventually we are either with Jesus or against Him, either with the demonic Taliban who would love to put a bomb in the marketplace of our hearts or we are with Jesus. Today is our wake up call.

I don't believe Christians can be possessed by evil spirits, but I do believe they can get oppressed or harassed/tempted/persecuted by them.

2) We need not be afraid.

We need not be afraid. We have the authority in Jesus' name to tell any evil

spirit to leave, bug off, and get out of our lives. Let me tell you a true exorcism story.

There once was a time, a man came here as a visitor. He entered into our Sanctuary, our synagogue so to speak. He was feeling depressed so after the worship service he came forward into our prayer area in front of the cross and asked if a man could pray for him. He preferred a male, but all the men in the prayer team were already praying for others, and so the team leader asked me if I could go over to pray for this man. I said yes.

While I was praying for him, I lightly said, "And Lord, if there are any dark spirits bothering him, in the name of Jesus please take them out." I did not have any supernatural insight, no prophetic word. I just felt led to say that. As soon as I said that, his face changed into a horrifying scary face, grotesque, ghoulish, monster like, demonic.

I knew that because, as I have taught all of you when praying for people, I kept my eyes open. Why? Because it is good to see what good effect your prayer might be having and if bad spirits manifest. And sure enough, on this day, it was really good that my eyes were open.

As I prayed more for him, he suddenly got weak. He wanted to throw up (where is a waste basket when I need one?) but then felt he just needed to get down on the ground, so I helped him lie down on the floor.

The third service was about to begin, but I felt I needed to keep praying so I ran up to the worship leader on the stage, who was waiting for me to begin the service, and I said to him really quickly, "I can't start the service. You start it. I'm doing an exorcism."

His eyes got really big and he asked "Really?" and I said, "Yes really," and I ran back down the stage. Exorcisms – don't think of Linda Blair in the movie

The Exorcist – they can be much calmer than that as in this case, so off I went. Later, this guy came to, and I asked him what happened, and here is what he said, and I quote, "These things; they came out of me."

This man was not a Pentecostal. He had no experience in this kind of stuff. He was a visitor and was not a churchgoer. A man with a highly respected position in the community.

When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are saying, "I am stating this. I am asking for this that if the Lord grants this. It comes with the full authority of God Himself. I have the authority right now of the King of Kings, the Five-Star Admiral of the Universe, and so demons beware and obey!

3) If we truly follow Jesus then we are under His authority and can use His authority to fight evil.

When we pray in Jesus' name, we have His authority. I am like a private saying platoon or a squadron or a division officer, "The General has told me that you are to leave now." For that one moment, I have the full authorization of God in my prayer. That is why I say you must always end your prayers in Jesus' name, in Christ's name because without that you have no authority.

There is power in the name of Jesus. We baptize in the name of Jesus. At the benediction I bless you in the name of Jesus. As it says in the Bible:

Philippians 2:10 So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth

When we pray for anything, pray in the Lord's name because you are asking for His will, that it might be done in His name. But it is also a prayer of protection.

About 20 years ago, before cell phones, my friend Margie was coming home to her home here in Honolulu.

She found her back door and her front door open. She went outside with a portable wireless phone and called the police to tell them that her home had been burglarized. But then she was worried that her church computer she had was upstairs, so she went back inside and upstairs.

Suddenly a stranger (a teenager) came hurtling down the stairs at her with a walking stick that had a marble dragon head on it. He began hitting her over and over again and she fell back down the stairs. She tried to protect herself with her arms and legs, but he stood over her and kept hitting her head and then her arms where later she counted 10 big bruises and bumps.

On and on he kept striking her. She was losing consciousness, when suddenly she said the Holy Spirit saved her and she yelled, out the name of Jesus she yelled and I quote: "Jesus Christ son of the Living God help me"

She then yelled it again as she was still being hit. "Jesus Christ son of the Living God help me!"

She yelled it a third time. "Jesus Christ son of the Living God help me!"

The stick in the hand of the teenager wobbled and she grabbed it and then he bolted and ran off. Yes, Margie did get hurt, but he could have kept hitting her and killed her but instead he did run off. She called upon the name of Jesus.

As King David once proclaimed, when an evil-spirited King Saul wanted to kill him but David escaped. King David wrote:

2Sam. 22:2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,

2Sam. 22:3 my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.

2Sam. 22:4 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

And so I end my sermon again saying, to you adults and maybe teenagers or children....never ever be afraid of the dark side. The Lord is with you. Follow Him. Trust Him. Pray and live in His Name. For you will have His power and authority.

Remember I ended my last sermon with that GK Chesterton quote? I want to say it again for you, children and adults: "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."

And I close with this last thought. When I began this sermon, I had asked, "what person do you see yourself in this sermon?" A synagogue attender, a rabbi, a teacher, maybe later one of Jesus' disciples who walks in with Jesus? But probably none or few of you chose, the one who suffered from demons.

Maybe it is not from demons but some of you have come here oppressed or have come with a heavy heart. Maybe it is due to something emotional or physical or due to a relationship that has become a burden to you. Maybe a wrestling with self-esteem, a problem of some kind. Maybe an addiction. Maybe a general sense of loss of hope. I am not saying they are due to demonic activity.

I was talking to some people the other day who, because of a medical issue for the last year and a half, felt so depressed and heavy laden. We prayed in Jesus' name and they felt a peace. So as we get ready for Communion, the sacrament that we do in Jesus' name, eating the bread and drinking the cup in His name. As the elders and deacons get ready for serving Communion, I shall pray for a spiritual intervention by Jesus that you might be freed, healed, spirits lifted In Jesus' Name. LET'S PRAY.