

**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon**  
**Sunday, January 28, 2018**  
**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – Mark 1: 21-28**

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ  
Amen.*

For centuries, everyone believed the heavier an object was, the faster it would fall. Aristotle, one of the greatest minds of his, and all of time, thought that. Anyone could easily test it by dropping two objects of differing weights and seeing which one landed first. But apparently no one did that until years after Aristotle's death. Legend has it that in 1589, Galileo went to the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and at the same time, dropped a ten pound weight and a one pound weight. Both landed – at the same time. However, the power of past thought and belief was so strong that other scientists, present that day for the experiment, denied their eyesight and continued to say that Aristotle was right.

That same kind of denial of reality happens all the time even today. It happens in all aspects of life – in our relationships at home, work, school, and in our politics – all the time. From Aristotle to Galileo, to us , the problem is the same – we are going to believe what we comfortable believing, regardless of what is true. But something different occurred when Jesus was in that Capernaum synagogue that day – the day we hear about in our Gospel lesson. Jesus' teaching was different than any other rabbi's teaching. And, at that moment in time, they were accepting it. When Galileo dropped those weights – they ignored that result. But that day they were not ignoring this new reality of Jesus and his ministry. Why? One word. Authority. He taught as one having authority. Why? What did they hear and see in Jesus that made him different from the other teachers? Why, at that moment, did they believe him? First, his teaching was new. It was new because Jesus moved from past to present tense. Most rabbis started their teaching with: "Moses said," or "Isaiah said." But when Jesus taught, he said, "I say to you." All other rabbis said to offer a sacrifice in the temple for the forgiveness of sins, but Jesus said to the people: "Your sins are forgiven." Other rabbis encouraged people to believe in God. But Jesus said "Believe in me." The difference was amazing. All other rabbis' authority came from quoting scripture. But with Jesus – Jesus was the authority. He did not just speak with authority – he was the authority. "I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the bread of life, I

am the light of the world.” Here was something new and powerful and amazing. With Jesus – God was no longer in the past. God was in the present, standing before them in the body, life and worlds of Jesus.

Another reason – a big reason people were drawn to Jesus is that Jesus affirmed, proved, backed up what he said with actions. – Jesus did what he said – his words, as they were spoken, became reality. That is power. That is authority. And Jesus used his authority – to love, to forgive, to show mercy.

In the middle of one of Jesus’ sermons, Jesus was interrupted by a man possessed with a demon, and Jesus showed he had power, authority over that demon. Let’s look at this in our Gospel lesson today. Mark told us that this guy didn’t burst into the synagogue – he was already there – probably someone who was often there. And, this affliction was not identified as a physical problem – but only as an unclean spirit – a demon –not tied to any physical illness. I would guess the evil influence on this man was of a moral nature. Something was causing this guy and people around him turmoil and upheaval. What was it? You pick one. Was the evilness -- the demon of hate, revenge, a need for power, greed, ambition gone wrong, narcissism, fear, guilt, envy. Which one? All these demons – what we call evil – are all still very much present and destroying lives and countries today. This man was possessed, and all that means is that his particular weakness, whatever it was – had gained control over him. This still happens all the time. All of us have challenges, weaknesses that can become evil if we allow them to control us. Today, God has provided us with many tools to help us with our challenges – our life-taking behaviors – things that possess us and cause us to act in ways harmful to self and others. We have science, medicines, history, philosophy, psychology – all good tools to help us with our issues – our dark sides – our demons. All those sciences are good – gifts from God; but our lesson today tells us that our strongest, best and most powerful tool to help us with our demons – that which can possess us and cause us to act in fear and insecurity is Jesus. “Be still – and come out of him!” And all of a sudden, the man was set free from his demons. What are your demons? What makes you act in ways that are self-centered and not loving? What makes me selfish, greedy? What makes me tear others down with words and gossip? What makes us fearful of people and ideas that are different? What makes me think that I am right and you are wrong? What makes me think that the world is my oyster and I can use all the resources I can afford to use even when my extravagance hurts you? For years, I’ve thought about my behavior – and I know what possesses me to act and think in ways hurtful to others. For me it’s described in one word. I could say “sin” and that’s true – but

that's too religious – too easy – and not helpful. The word for me is “insecurity.” When I am insecure, I keep what's mine. When I am insecure, I talk about you in ways that make me look good and you look bad. When I am insecure, I use my position and I use you, who you are, to get stuff for myself. When I am insecure, I am fearful of what is different and new and unknown. When I am insecure, I can be possessed by my lowest common denominator behaviors. What can set me free? “Be silent! Come out of him!” I hear those words. Jesus is the only one who can set me free. When I am secure in Jesus’ love, I can be set free from my demons. And it happens. There are minutes and hours and times when I am free. When I am so secure in Jesus’ love, that’s when I can be the best Steve Lynn I can be – then all I care about is you. That’s when I am the creation God intended. But at other times, when I am possessed by my insecurity, my demons, then I’m not my best self. I am certain that you aren’t much different than me. So let’s hear the words of Jesus that set us free –

Here this: Jesus loves you. You don’t need to be insecure or afraid of others or of failure or of new ideas or change. Jesus yells to the demons – yours and mine. “Come out! And they will. Jesus has that authority. But because you and I are human – and on this side of heaven – we allow our demons back in. We aren’t perfect. We give them space. But Jesus is the only reason for the times when I am free. He is the authority over our demons. I want more of those times when I am free. Worship, prayer, Holy Communion, Super Wednesday, fellowship with you, service to my neighbor – It’s those activities that allow me to hear how much Jesus loves me. His authority that frees us is his love. Love is so powerful. Jesus is love. Jesus loves you. When you hear that – your demons – your issues – your insecurities can be overpowered too. *Amen.*