

Preached by Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Deuteronomy 18:15-20  
Mark 1: 21-28

## **NO MAGIC - JUST POWER**

Who is Jesus? Long before there were church councils or theologians to debate the nature of Christ, there was a gospel writer named Mark who wanted to answer the question once and for all. Who is Jesus?

And for Mark, Jesus is the one who speaks with authority. People were not amazed to see Jesus in a worship service. They weren't astounded by his presence in a synagogue or even by his standing up to read. What astounded them was his ability to make the words come to life. The people sensed and saw the time when evil was overcome by the word of the Lord—when demonic powers that would seek to misguide not only humanity, but especially the church, had been set on their heels by the Word of God in the flesh in Christ.

It's noteworthy how easily we become accustomed to uncleanness in our lives and uncleanness in the church. Do you remember a time when the call to righteousness was little more than "don't curse, don't drink and don't chew, and don't hang out with those who do." That was the essence of the gospel message for many years. Keep your life in order. Understand that you're called to a new way of living. We take such powerful words and we reduce them to something that we can remember.

Isn't it astounding that a man walks into the most sacred of Jewish experiences—into their holy place—with an unclean spirit. This is a place where cleanliness is almost overemphasized, where rituals of purification are strictly followed. No one who is unclean is supposed to come in; but the rituals had become hollow—meaningless.

Look at our own experience of worship. Did any of those words in the prayer of confession cause you any discomfort whatsoever? Did any of the things that we just prayed prick your heart? Did you wonder if that was God's word for you—for all of us today?

So often, especially in our world, we are encouraged to present ourselves and to affirm who we are. If we are not careful, we glorify the self.

The story is told of a man who was captivated by the idea of fly fishing, so he went out and bought the finest equipment and the finest clothes. He truly looked the part. He went out to fish and caught nothing. And on his way home he saw a boy with a taped-together pole and a fishing line that was held together by knots with a rusty hook. He asked the boy what his secret was. How did he have so many fish when this man had all the equipment he needed and had caught nothing. The little boy, with all honesty, said, "I think sometimes it's best to not let them see you—who you are."

I wonder today if we have indeed forgotten that it is not us we present, but it is Christ in us. And no wonder that we are not attracting the kind of devotion—the sort of deep interest that we long to fear with our community and with one another.

No wonder the worshipers of Jesus' day didn't recognize the demon-possessed man. They had become so comfortable with their own demons there was no fear within them. But note: they did not even recognize Jesus in the spirit that was his until these demons spoke out. Can you imagine having the spirit of Christ right in front of you and not seeing who he really is? Jesus had told them "If you have seen me you have seen the father who sent me."

Our gospel lesson and the lessons from Deuteronomy today challenge us the same way those first two hymns challenged you to keep up, to pay attention.

Are we committed to any truth, save the truth we have distilled about ourselves? Is there truth beyond our defining? A truth that redefines us? A truth about Christ? A truth that leads us to witness to Christ alone? A truth about our calling—about how we have been commissioned as Christ's disciples?

When we lose the passion to embody the truth of Christ in one part of our lives, it becomes all too easy to lose that passion in every part of our lives. We run the risk—the serious risk—of abandoning, of turning our back on the very things that make Jesus, Jesus. Notice how simple the exorcism is—be silent and allow Christ to call that which contradicts Christ in us out. I think it's the "be silent" part we have a hard time with.

If anything, this meal today reminds us that everything we do—everything we say, every expression of tender understanding and patience—does not come from us, but it comes from someone who has gone before us and faced our every trial. I wonder, today, if our passage and our experience in worship remind us that all goodness comes from without—it is completely other than who we are. And yet, Christ has said, "I stand at the door and knock." I wonder if we can believe that the same truth that motivated Christ can take over and take charge of what motivates us.

Jesus is more concerned about God's grace and God's power in our lives than we could ever admit. But I fear what concerns Christ most—what he cannot seem to fully comprehend—is why grace has been given so freely to us, why that reconciliation which we have received is not freely shared.

Will we be still? We have the opportunity today in this service. Will we be unanxious in these moments and allow the Holy Spirit to remove from our lives any voice but the voice of Christ alone?

We're here. We have the opportunity. So may it be. I encourage you to take this meal seriously and to prepare for it by surrendering anything that has become more important to you than your relationship with Christ. Let that happen now and we will have truly worshiped the Lord.