

## True Teaching

Mark 1:21-28

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 February 1, 2015

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Teaching is a big concern in our day. Everyone seems vitally concerned about the teaching of children in schools: what they should be taught and what they should not be taught. Yesterday's Ottawa Citizen talked about how important it is to teach math properly. The Citizen over the past few weeks has also been talking about whether it is appropriate or not to teach children about sexual activity, and if so when and how.

Teaching is something that we think that we know a fair bit about, especially those of us who are teachers. I stand up in front of my class and teach them. It seems pretty simple. Of course, there are various ways that we can do it. I can lecture the whole time. I can sit down with the students and engage them in a seminar. I can just stand back and let them talk and interject a few comments where it seems appropriate. But, in the end my goal is that they would learn. Learn what? Well, whatever the subject matter is, whether it is math, or English, or theology.

Is that teaching as you understand it? You would probably say to me that what I am doing this morning here is teaching. I'm leading you into what I hope will be a deeper understanding of God's Word written in the Gospel of Mark. As Christians, we consider the material of both the Old and New Testaments as teachable material, and in fact not just as teachable but as material that needs to be taught for our well-being. And that's exactly right.

What about Jesus' teaching? You heard me read about it to you. Now let's see one artist's depiction of what that teaching looked like in action.



What you see Jesus doing in the first part of the film clip from Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* is exactly the kind of teaching that you and I are familiar with. Jesus was leading those who were listening to him into a fuller understanding of what the Old Testament was saying, and what the Old Testament law was about. <sup>21</sup> And they [Jesus and his first four disciples] went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

The scribes, like Jesus, were teachers. Their goal was not only to read what the Old Testament said but also to explain it to the people so that they could understand the Law and, having understood it, live it. They didn't just get paid to read the law and then leave it at that. That's not teaching. That's just public reading.

But, Jesus clearly had an ability to make the law understood in a way that suggested that he was doing more than interpreting. He taught with authority. In other words, he sounded more like he knew what the law meant, as if he WERE the law-giver. In fact, he was! In Matthew's Gospel, that becomes absolutely clear: You have heard that it was said to you... you shall not kill... you shall not commit adultery... etc. but I say to you if you look at a person with hate in your heart, you've already killed him... if you look at another man's wife and set your heart upon stealing her away from her husband, then you've already committed adultery.

That's what Jesus was doing in the synagogue that day: he was teaching the Scriptures as the author of the Scriptures. That's what the people see and hear... he teaches about the Law and he does so with authority!

But, then, something happens, doesn't it, and the film displays it well. Suddenly, into the synagogue where Jesus has been teaching, a demon possessed man runs in... one of the most wretched of the people of Jesus' day, and yet one to whom God is coming.

And what happens? Well, the film displays what happens in such a powerful way, anything that I could say would only diminish its power.

But I want you to notice not just what the man who plays the father in the film says -- Praised be the Lord! -- which is eloquent and heartfelt but what Mark tells us the people said in his Gospel. In vs. 27 the people exclaim: <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

In other words: yes, Jesus teaches the Law, and he does so with authority; but there's more to his teaching. There's something dramatically new in Jesus' teaching. The people say that what Jesus has done in expelling the demon from the man is teaching, a new teaching. And it is this teaching that causes his fame to spread throughout Galilee (vs. 28). Why? Because this isn't just teaching about God. This is teaching in the power of God. This is both explanation with authority AND a visible demonstration that God has confronted the evil that enchains humans and has freed the captives from evil.

This story from Mark tells us that teaching that follows the example of Jesus is more than just what we think happens in school or even here on a Sunday morning. The teaching of Jesus also includes the kinds of signs and wonders done by the prophets of God like Moses and Elijah, and the even greater signs and wonders done by the Son of God Himself, in which Satan and his powers are confronted and defeated visibly and powerfully and in which the captives are set free. This is full, and true Christian teaching: not just about Jesus, but in the power of Jesus.

We know that Christians after Jesus kept this kind of teaching alive. In the Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47), we read that the earliest Christians were clearly different from the people around them as a group because of four things, four things that caused these people to stand out and be different from the people of their world: first, they prayed together regularly, even outside of the set times for prayer at the Temple when they had to pray; second, unlike other people in the Mediterranean world of their day, they didn't just eat with family members or close friends: they shared food together regularly, and it was especially noteworthy that they did so with people who were NOT family members and NOT like them; third, those who had many possessions shared with those who had little, so that no one in their community was ever in need; and fourth, they continued to teach what the apostles taught and as the apostles taught.

It should be no different for us today.

We are called to pray together regularly, not just when the church bell rings and calls us here on Sunday mornings. So, you need to ask yourselves: when you meet each other, do you pray together, or do you just chit-chat? It doesn't take much to pray and you don't have to pull out a prayer book or liturgy. All you have to do is speak aloud your thanks to God for the goodness that he has shared with you, and perhaps to pray for those whom you might speak about with some skepticism or doubts or those whom you have just gossiped about. People will notice, sure, but that's the point. You're different!

And like the earliest Christians, we are called to eat together, not just as families or close friends. You come together here for the Lord's Supper but do you take that model into your homes and invite members of the community whom you would not otherwise have over to join you for a meal from time to time? In our parish we have a practice we call Parish Night Out where parishioners put their names on a list then someone from the parish shuffles them up and assigns different people to a host's house. The guests bring food and the hosts are responsible simply for providing drinks and a welcome to those who come. It has been a wonderful way to meet people in the parish. And people notice: our neighbours say: who were all those people that you had over the other night? They're not from around here are they? You're different. That's the point!

And like the earliest Christians we are called not to store up treasures for ourselves but to share what we have with those who are in need. I imagine that you do this with each other. But, sometimes, we're not aware of needs. Friday night we were with a friend who had gone to Bible school. At the school, there was a mix of people who were fairly well off and some who were quite needy, but who were embarrassed to say anything about it. One day, in one of the school's fellowship times, one of the instructors asked the group: How many of you out there have been blessed financially by the Lord recently? A group of people put their hands up. And then he said: How many of you out there are willing to admit that you are struggling because the Lord hasn't blessed you recently? Another group of people put their hands up. He then said: OK, I'm going to leave now because the two groups of you who held your hands up need to talk.

But also, like the earliest Christians, we are called to continue the apostles' teaching. And if that teaching is to be true teaching then it must reflect the teaching of Jesus. That's what John Calvin said true apostolic teaching was: the teaching of Jesus! And you have seen this morning that the teaching of Jesus is much more than what happens in the pulpit on a Sunday morning or what happens with the kids in Sunday School, much more than what happens in University or seminary. True teaching was not just exposition of the Scriptures, important as that was. It was not just going through the Old Testament and showing how it had been fulfilled in their day by Himself, who was God coming to us. It was much more than that. It was not just saying that God was coming to us. It is not just saying today that God has come to us. It is **SHOWING** that God has come to us and that he is delivering people from bondage to the true enemy of God, which is Satan and his demons. This is what Jesus' disciples, the first apostles, saw that day in the synagogue and this is the teaching that they eventually found themselves doing by the power of the Holy Spirit. True teaching is what happens whenever the power of Satan and his demons is visibly and effectively conquered through the name and power and authority of the Lord. Anything less is just half-way to true teaching and produces half-hearted Christians.

Now if you want to be half-hearted Christians, only half Christian and half something else, then you won't want to worry about what I've said this morning. But, if you want to be true Christians, following the true teaching of the Lord Himself, then you, too, will want to continue the apostles' teaching. Understand me well: true teaching is not just weird and wacky things happening in your midst. True teaching is what prepares Christians to fight the battles through which God is bringing order out of chaos, not creating more chaos, battles in which God is bringing life out of death, not more dying.

So in your case, true teaching will probably start by asking yourselves whether you have learned how to be able to identify the true enemy in our day -- not the enemy that the media tells you is our enemy, not the enemy that you might think is our enemy because they look different from us, not the enemy that you might think is your enemy because you don't like them... the question is who the Lord's enemy is. That's your true enemy, and the Lord's true teaching is for you to fight on His side against that enemy and no other.

But, I can tell you that true teaching is only going to show itself to be true teaching when you take up the right weapons that you need to defeat this enemy. Because true teaching is teaching that will enable you not only to identify the enemy but also to defeat the enemy. And, believe me, people will notice when those who have been in chains through the power of evil are delivered from those chains by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unless you wish to be only a half-hearted Christian, are you prepared to be a whole Christian, shaped by true teaching? May God prepare us to receive His whole Word and go forth from here and be the whole people of God.