

“The Power to Do”

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 Mark 1:21-28

Scott B. Martin – February 1, 2009

The sky was dark as the ferry pulled away from port and headed into the darkness. The passengers settled into their seats and births for the journey. Some sipping their coffee or heading to the bar. Others talking and laughing. Others still grabbing a quick nap. The crew quietly went about their tasks.

Little did any one realize that the bulkhead doors had not been properly secured after the cars had been brought on board. The lights of land were quickly disappearing as the water began to rush into the cargo hold. Suddenly the alarm sounded. Too late! Soon the ferry and its cargo of cars was listing radically to one side, allowing even more water in. Panic reigned as people scrambled about looking for a way out, a way to save themselves. Everywhere there were shouts of: “Which way should I go?” “Where are the lifeboats?” “Where’s my wife?” “Help me!” Bedlam reigned supreme.

Suddenly, heard above the shouts, a voice rang out loud and clear. It seemed full of preternatural calm and authority although it did not come from any of the crewmembers. One of the fellow passengers began to give directions and enlisting others to help. Thank God, someone seemed to be in charge and knew where to go and what to do. Many were able to find the lifeboats and safety because of this one man.

The man headed down into the hold of the ship, towards the rapidly rising water, to see if he could help any who were trapped below. The ferry’s lights were flickering, the water was swirling, flotsam and jetsam was bobbing on the water and in it’s midst people swimming and clinging debris.

There in the hold the man hung on to the ladder and reached out a submerged part of the ship, creating a bridge so that more people might reach safety. First one, then another and then another was able to cross to safety.

When the nightmare was over and all the lifeboats had been gathered in many told stories of the courageous man who had helped them find safety. They looked about to thank him, but it was discovered the man had perished when the ferry sank into the frigid waters. **“He had literally given his life in using the authority he had assumed – the**

authority by which many had been saved.” (Dr. Tom Wright, *“Mark for Everyone”* p. 11)

A different coast, ... a different time, ... and we find ourselves at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. A Galilean carpenter is reading the Holy Scriptures and expounding on them in the synagogue in Capernaum. He does not come from a priestly family. He has not studied a the feet of a noted rabbi or any rabbi. He does not refer to what this or that religious scholar said, not even to what Moses said.

Jesus is speaking about the kingdom of God. It is clear to all that when this Jesus speaks about the kingdom, it is not some ancient hope that has never come to pass, nor is it some future wish yet to be fulfilled, no this man Jesus seems to embody the very essence of the kingdom of God on earth NOW!

Jesus is telling them about God’s hopes and dreams for them and for this world. They believe him! They believe they can make a new start and the world can begin anew. The Spirit of God is moving through Jesus, through them and they can already feel the change!

Just as everyone is ready to shout “Hallelujah! Amen!” and go home, a man with an “unclean spirit” shouted 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.”** (Mark 1:24)

The congregation recognized in Jesus an “unusual and mysterious authority” but it is up to God’s antagonists to name the source and purpose of Jesus of Nazareth. **“You are the Holy One of God!”** How odd and yet how strangely appropriate that this should be the case. It is out of love for humanity and the world that Jesus the Christ has come, to wrestle with the mysterious principalities and powers that enslave us, break us, and leave us anxious and afraid.

Jesus, who moments before, was speaking so authoritatively about the kingdom of God now proves he also has the power to push back the powers of darkness and despair and bring healing where only brokenness existed before. The man with the unclean spirit is made whole. His spirit has been cleansed. The congregation that had been amazed at Jesus’ teaching is now amazed by Jesus’ actions. Jesus’ words not only have power to move us they have power to change the world and us. No wonder Mark tells us that Jesus’ fame quickly began to spread far and wide.

“Jesus had joined in a struggle against the forces of evil and destruction, forces that, like the dark, cruel sea pouring in on top of frightened and helpless travelers, seemed sometimes to be carrying all before them. Jesus came to be the human bridge across which people could climb to safety. And if, in the process, he himself paid with his own life the price of this saving authority, a human bridge with outstretched arms carrying people from death to life, that was simply part of the integrity of his action. The demons had their final shriek at him as he hung on the cross, challenging and mocking him for the last time the validity of his authority. On the cross he completed the healing work he began that day in the synagogue.”
(Dr. Tom Wright, *“Mark for Everyone”*, p. 12)

Does this mean we can not still hear the voices of the demons in our world and in our hearts, souls and minds. No, their voices can still be heard. They whisper and sometimes shout at us such things as: “You can never change!”; “You are worthless to yourself and the world?; “Your life doesn’t matter to anyone!”; “You are all alone!”; “No one can help you!” “Peace is impossible!”; “Think only about yourself, no one else matters!” “Death and failure are the last word!”

Healings, miracles and forgiveness are real and still happen. Many struggling with addictions find a higher power to keep them clean. Broken relationships and marriages are healed. Sins are forgiven. Peace comes between long time antagonists.

Everyone loves an underdog. I’ve been interested in the several recent stories about the Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner. To say the least he has had an up and down career. He spent three seasons with an arena league and two more years in Europe before getting his chance at the big time in the NFL. Then, even after he was in two Super Bowls and won one, he found himself bouncing from team to team. Four years ago he could hardly find a job, even as a back up. Now he is taking the unlikely Cardinals to the first Super Bowl in their team history! He says of all this, **“Most times when you do something great, it’s not overnight. It’s not something that comes easy. It comes with a lot of hard work, a lot of time, a lot of commitment.”**

What is perhaps less known is that he is a strong person of faith. He says of this, **“Everything I do, everywhere I go, I’m trying to live up to or represent Jesus. Having the faith I have is first and foremost in my life.”**

Warner and his wife Brenda have started a foundation, "First Things". Among the programs they engage is the "Basket of Hope" in which baskets are delivered, sometimes by Kurt and Brenda themselves, to families and patients who have recently been admitted to a children's hospital. Among the items in the baskets are bibles, games, prayer books and stuffed animals. Kurt and Brenda are also involved with Special Olympics, holding foot ball clinics in several cities across the country.

Jesus came speaking and acting with authority to spread the kingdom, to act as a bridge of healing in a broken world. Jesus came seeking to not only bring healing to each of us but to enlist us in the service of the kingdom. Amen.