

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 28, 2018

Text: Mark 1:21-28

Theme: “Are Demons Smarter than People?”

There are plenty of contests of the intellect. There are shows like *Jeopardy*. It is a combination of knowing a lot of stuff and having quick recall. You may know the answer well enough, but if you can't bring it up in a hurry you won't get to answer no matter how hard you press the button. So you may venture to the edge of what you know for sure and what you think you may indeed know in hopes of being the first to buzz in. “March 30, 1964.” “On what date did the first episode of *Jeopardy* air?” (so says Google)

Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader? was another show testing knowledge. Adults answered questions from a 5th grade course level. Contestants could enlist the help of actual 5th graders in the process. When you lost, too many wrong answers, you would have to say, “My name is _____ and I'm not smarter than a 5th grader.” There are many other shows. *Wheel of Fortune* does require some mental capabilities.

Are you smarter than my dog? Most likely so. Are you smarter than a fence post? There should be no doubt. Are you smarter than a demon? Now this could be a different matter. We consider that question by looking at our text. The demon recognizes Jesus right off, “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.” (vs 24) It was not surprising the demon knew Jesus was from Nazareth, that was common knowledge. The amazing part is, “the holy One of God.” The demon doesn't whisper. He cries out. We see Jesus being recognized by the demons throughout the New Testament. Just a little later here in Mark 1 (vs 34) we read, “He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him.”

In Acts 19 we read of some unsuccessful Jewish exorcists. There some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had an evil spirit, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus, whom Paul proclaims.” Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (13-15) Yes, the demons knew who Jesus was. The devil certainly knew who Jesus is when he comes to tempt Him in the wilderness.

What about the people? They were certainly taking notice of Jesus. His teaching was drawing attention as he taught as one who had authority and not as the scribes (vs 22). They are described as “astonished.” The word, *εὐκπλαῖα*, *sw, eklepto*, the idea **to strike out, expel by a blow, drive out or away; to cast off by a blow**, --maybe like having the wind knocked out of you? It was impossible not to be amazed. In John 7 we read of those who had been sent to arrest Jesus, but came back empty handed. “The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” (vs 46) Yes His teaching was an attention getter.

And then there were the miracles. Jesus rebukes the demon and drives him out. “They were amazed...What is this? A new teaching and with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” (vs 27) We read in Mark 7, “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (vs 37) Finally in Luke 7:14-16, “Then He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among

us!” and, “God has visited His people!” His teaching raised notice. His miracles made His light shine brighter.

Yet the people were not as quick to know him as the demons. Yes, they were making identifications. As we saw in Luke 7 they called him a “great prophet.” In Matthew 16 we see he was being identified as John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the prophets of old (vs 14). After He fed the crowd of over 5000 with five loaves and two fish and 12 baskets of fragments were taken up the people said, “This is indeed the prophet (the one Moses wrote of in our OT lesson today) who is to come into the world.” (John 6:14) Peter would identify Him as the Christ (Matthew 16:16). Jesus was not escaping notice.

Peter, of course was right, Jesus is the Christ. The crowd was also correct, Jesus was the Prophet who has to come into the world. It was a matter of correct identification, but wrong understanding. Jesus is the Christ, but most were looking for a king of the David variety only stronger and mightier. His light was bright but they were putting the dimmer on who He actually was.

The demons knew, and the people did not. So are demons smarter than people? They may well be, but that is not the reason for their knowing Jesus. They had better eyesight. They could see the unseen, see the eternal majesty and glory, seeing what was beyond humans unless it was revealed. We have an example of this in 2 Kings 6: We read there, “When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”¹⁶ He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man,

and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (vss 15-17)

The demons knew the powers that be and always will be, even the Power. They remembered how it had all come to be. It was the Almighty who created the heavens and earth, all that is seen and all that is unseen, angels included, angels who all sang His praises. It was good, even very good. They remembered what had happened, the rebellion. Satan, the dragon, the snake, decided to challenge the Creator. He convinced other angels to join in. Maybe they could overcome even the Almighty. But that did not turn out very well. Satan and his forces had been defeated by Michael and his angels and they had been cast out of heaven forever.

So when they looked at Jesus they saw the Holy One, God in His power. They knew the true state of affairs. “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...” (2 Peter 2:4) This demon was not in hell at the moment but he was tethered to there by God’s judgment. He was not getting away. Yes, He saw Jesus in His righteousness and holiness. He could see that clearly and it was not a comforting sight.

We by nature, sinful nature, had poor sight, even blind. We could not understand the things of God. It was trying to drive with our eyes pasted shut. It was a sight condition we could not correct. Now as those brought to faith, enlightened with the Gospel, we have been given eyes to see. The old nature has been shoved under but he’s raising up his periscope to try to convince us to go back to the blindness. So we have a hard time seeing beyond how Christ can enhance my life instead of losing my life in Him. Or we put on filters to view a Christ more in line with our want instead of the Christ that He is.

Yes, we have been given eyes to see. We have been given eyes even to see the full extent of our blindness apart from Christ. The light of God's law illumines the full extent of our wretchedness. We saw we were chained to frustration, despair, death, even damnation. But the Gospel lifts us from that dark future.

In our lesson from Deuteronomy 18, Moses refers to the people saying they could not have God continue to speak to them or see the fire of His glory and live. They were right. God has come down to us in the Prophet Moses spoke of, the One we are to listen to, away where glory is veiled. We celebrated His coming at Christmas.

Now Epiphany is about the light coming on. The Gospel light lights up the horizon to show Christ is the Savior for all nations. In Epiphany the teaching and miracles of Jesus are the light of Jesus showing He is more than a man. It all comes to a climax with His transfiguration where Peter, James, and John are given a glimpse of glory. We see Jesus as the Holy One of God, the Holy God. Again, we see we were poor, wretched, and blind and could never save ourselves. But the Holy One became poor and wretched for us. He left the glories of heaven to come below to save us. He lived the perfect life and then suffered the wretched death of the cross for us. It sure looked like the light had gone out. He was dead and buried.

But we live in the light of His resurrection and ascension. The Gospel shines the light of what is ours in Jesus. Paul tells us, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:18) One day we will be with Him in His glory. One day He returns in all His glory and we will behold Him face to face not in fear, but in joy. All this is yet to come, yet even today, right now, we approach God's throne of grace through His Son.

We are not the true light. Jesus is. He is not a flashlight in our hands that we can direct to only illumine the things we wish to see. The Light of Jesus is the light of His Word, and the light we have from within as His that permeates throughout our whole being. We have been called to lives of service to the One who teaches with all authority. He lights up our paths, gives us wisdom, not so we can puff ourselves up but to know how to serve our neighbor. As we walk in faithfulness we too are lights, not the light of “in your face,” but the light of “let me help you see the way.” We will have the opportunity to speak of the source of the light, the hope that we have within.

So our demons smarter than people? I really don't know. They see Jesus in His holiness, a frightful holiness as they have already been judged. It is pure terror. We are given eyes to see that this Holy One humbled Himself to save us. When we see Jesus face to face it will be pure joy. The Spirit gives us eyes of faith. We have seen Jesus and we want others to see Him too. For Jesus' sake. Amen