

*“Beyond the Boundaries”*

It has been pointed out, “For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he said that the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth. Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time, and surely he would not be wrong. Anyone, of course, could have taken two objects, one heavy and one light, and dropped them from a great height to see whether or not the heavier object landed first. But no one did until nearly 2,000 years after Aristotle’s death. Legend has it that in 1589 Galileo summoned learned professors to the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Then he went to the top and pushed off a ten-pound and a one-pound weight. Both landed at the same instant. The power of belief was so strong, however, that the professors denied their eyesight. They continued to say Aristotle was right. (From the sermon, “Astonishing!” on sermons.com)

Unfortunately, regardless of the facts, there are some folks, who refuse to accept the truth. The world frequently claims something to be true, which, in fact is not true. Indeed, conspiracy theories and insinuations have been multiplying in our society. A significant number of people seem to believe what they want to be the truth is what makes something true. They have become prisoners of their beliefs and their own prejudices, emotions, fears, and desires. It takes something amazing to break through such blind and baseless belief, so one might know the truth and live a liberated and truly good life.

The event described in our Scripture was one of those extraordinary events! The Gospel of Mark began to explain in **verse 22**, *“The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn’t like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.”* In modern times, more and more people have seen little value in authority. Many have, instead, put trust in their personal wants and subjective beliefs. Jewish Society, during Jesus’ public ministry, was forced by the power of the Legalists – the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and Priests to follow their demands for radical submission to the laws traditionally attributed to Moses. The people saw such tyranny was based on power and control, instead of on true authority, so they were surprised when Jesus spoke and acted with authority independent of Jewish laws.

With that background in mind, Mark continued his description of the event in **verses 23-24**, *“Just then a man with an evil spirit came into the synagogue and screamed, ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are — you are God’s holy messenger!’”* The distraught man had no delusion about his life being out of his control and, so, he was open to the truth about Jesus’ identity – him being “God’s holy messenger”. Whereas, the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law were so full of their own self-righteousness they refused to recognize Jesus and his authority. With our society having diminished the value of authority, very few persons are open the possibility Jesus Christ will liberate them from their bondage to false gods and fear and, then, transform their lives in wonderful ways!

“Leslie Weatherhead once told a parable of a little boy who fled from a witch who had turned herself into a cat. As the boy ran, he kept glancing fearfully over his shoulder. The first time he looked back, the cat was the size of a calf. The next time he looked, it had grown to the dimensions of an elephant. Then the boy fell and was unable to go farther. Resolutely, he got up and faced the pursuing horror. It stopped. So, he took a step toward it. It backed away. As he continued to advance toward it, it began to shrink in size as it retreated from him. Finally, it changed into a mouse and ran under the door of the witch’s cottage to be seen no more.”

Weatherhead concluded, “The moral is clear: it pays to face up to your fears. But sometimes that is hard to do. That is when we need to turn to Christ. He can help us stand up to our fears and conquer them. He can cast out demons.” (Adapted from Leslie Weatherhead by sermons.com)

The extraordinary experience reported in our Scripture hit its high point in **verse 25**, “*Jesus ordered the spirit, ‘Be quiet, and come out of the man!’*” Mark’s account implied by the crowd’s response that the man was immediately healed. The parallel in the Gospel of Luke reported the demon cast the man to the ground and “went out of him without doing him any harm.” That experience proved to the crowd that Jesus’ authority was not just talk for he was able to set free the man from his demon – evil spirit – or whatever was the cause of his suffering. Indeed, Jesus liberates us from our prejudices, anger, greed, fears, and false gods!

Earlier in this Worship Celebration, it was said during the Threshold Moment, “Sometimes we are captured by the boundaries of our own making. Things have become so toxic in our lives that we are bound, imprisoned, by them. Today, along with the awestruck worshiping community in the scripture story, we experience the power of Jesus to call out unclean spirits – those things that rage within us, limiting our ability to love and grow. We can lean on the authority of Jesus in our lives to conquer and be freed to move beyond our boundaries.”

Brett Blair has said, “The church in the world is a lot like the story that E. Stanley Jones tells of the missionary in the jungle. He got lost with nothing around him but bush and a few cleared places. He finally found a small village and asked one of the natives if he could lead him out of the jungle. The native said he could. ‘All right,’ the missionary said, ‘Show me the way.’ They walked for hours through dense brush hacking their way through unmarked jungle. The missionary began to worry and said, ‘Are you quite sure this is the way? Where is the path?’ The native said, ‘Bwana, in this place there is no path. I am the path.’”

Blair concluded, “Our path out of the jungle of this world is God in Christ. We may have some Rabbis, Masters, Father’s, Teachers, and Reverends but we are all like the missionary. We rely not upon men but Christ who is our path.” (Brett Blair, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

The ways of the world encourage everyone to feel bound – to believe there are certain boundaries we cannot cross. The racial, sexual, ethnic, religious, and age prejudices of society are poured on us to keep us imprisoned to anger, hatred, greed, fears, and the desire to dominate others. Merely believing in God or that Jesus is God’s Son does not free us from bondage. It is when we look to Jesus Christ – to his teachings, interactions, forgiveness, radical hospitality toward all people, and his self-giving and sacrificial – agape love for everyone that we are open to being liberated from all that binds us! However, in order for us to be open to Jesus’ liberation of our lives, we need to recognize his authority over our lives, just as the man with the evil spirit knew Jesus’ true identity. Next, our lives are not transformed – we are not freed, if we merely believe Jesus can unbind us but never follow his example with our words and deeds. Finally, our liberation is incomplete, if we do not share this Good News with others, who experience rejection or are so imprisoned, they are unable to love or be loved. So, look to Jesus – trust his authority, follow his example of welcoming and loving all people, and invite everyone to experience moving beyond the boundaries, which are imposed upon us by the world and legalism with both our words and actions! Amen.