

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Epiphany 4
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Jesus has authority over even the Demons

²¹ Then they went into Capernaum.

On the next Sabbath day, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² They were amazed at his teaching, because he was teaching them as one who has authority and not as the experts in the law. ²³ Just then there was a man with an unclean spirit in their synagogue. It cried out, ²⁴ “What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

²⁵ Jesus rebuked the spirit, saying, “Be quiet! Come out of him!”

²⁶ The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions, and after crying out with a loud voice, it came out of him. ²⁷ Everyone was so amazed that they began to discuss this with each other. They said, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly through all the region of Galilee.

—Mark 1:21-28

Jesus has authority over even the demons

The devil is real. Demons are real. There are evil, demonic forces that daily fight to tear you down. Brothers and sisters in Christ, you must know this. We live in a society that has largely dismissed spiritual realities. They believe that because they cannot see the evil spirits, these forces must not exist. Yet, in all reality, they have fallen for the devil's trick. The devil's current tactic seems to be to convince people that he is not real. Yet, I repeat. The devil is real. Demons are real. There are evil, demonic forces that daily fight to tear you down.

Sadly, even many supposed Christians have been convinced to fall for this lie. Some claim that the belief in evil spirits was just a result of ancient superstitions. Others claim that the demonic activity in the Bible can be explained in better ways in our “rational age.” Let us not fall into these lies. We must believe the testimony of Scripture. As St. Peter wrote in his first letter, “*Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*” (1 Peter 5:8) Again, I repeat. The devil is real. Demons are real. There are evil, demonic forces that daily fight to tear you down.

Christians of old had a greater understanding of the presence and power of the devil and the evil spirits. This was reflected in Martin Luther's baptismal rite written in 1523. In this baptismal rite, the pastor was instructed to blow beneath the baby's eyes three times and say, “Depart thou unclean spirit and give room to the Holy Spirit.” Before the child's baptism, the pastor would have the child renounce the devil through the profession of his baptismal sponsors. He would ask them, “dost thou renounce the devil?”

Today, as we consider the occasion in which Jesus drove out an evil spirit from a man in the synagogue in Capernaum, we remember that the devil and demons are real. Yet, we know that Jesus has authority over them. Jesus, who is truly God, has ultimate authority over all our adversaries, both physical and spiritual. **Jesus has authority over even the demons.**

Here is a bit of Bible trivia to start with. What was Jesus' first miracle? Hopefully, you know this answer from your Sunday School instruction to your learning today. Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. John tells us this in his gospel. That however is not the first miracle recorded by Mark in the gospel that we read today. The first miracle shared by Mark is this very account. An exorcism is Jesus' first miracle in Mark. Does that sound right? Maybe that takes us back right away, but how fitting is that? Jesus came ultimately to save people from the spiritual attack by the devil and demons, not just the physical problems that we face day to day. In other miracles, we see that Jesus has power over the earthly elements. He had power over the physical composition of water. Another time we see that he has power over the wind and the waves. Another time we see that Jesus has power over illness. Yet, here, we see that Jesus has power and authority over the spiritual forces of evil. In today's gospel, we are comforted to see that Jesus has authority over the evil, invisible forces that fight against us daily.

After Jesus had called some of his disciples, Mark records that he went to Capernaum. During Jesus' earthly ministry, Capernaum was the headquarters of his ministry. As Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost, it makes sense that he made Capernaum his headquarters. Capernaum was on the Via Maris, which was a major trade route between Egypt and Damascus. Therefore, many people in Capernaum needed the light of Jesus.

While in Capernaum, Jesus would teach at the synagogue. A synagogue was like a religious and civic center of the city. There, people would gather and learn. At the synagogue of Capernaum, Jesus taught in a way that was

different than others. Those who heard his teaching recognized that he taught with authority, unlike the scribes who would teach there at other times.

On this particular Sabbath, while Jesus was teaching, a man who had an unclean spirit was there. This means that there was a man who was possessed by a demon. This demon cried out from the man, "*What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*" Perhaps, the demon was mocking Jesus. He recognized that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, head knowledge is not faith. This demon wanted nothing to do with Jesus the Christ.

What did Jesus have to do with this demon? Nothing but to shut him up and drive him out. That is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus proclaimed, "*Be quiet! Come out of him!*" Then, the demon threw the man into convulsions, screeched, and came out of him.

Upon seeing this, everyone in the synagogue of Capernaum was amazed by the authority of Jesus' Word. Not only did Jesus teach in a new and different way, but Jesus' word also had the power to drive out demons from those who were possessed and oppressed.

After Jesus drove out this demon and demonstrated his authority, the news about this event spread throughout Galilee. This news spread quickly. The news was the news about Jesus' authority. **Jesus has authority over even the demons.**

In the context of suburban North America, many may feel as though the presence and power of demons are not obvious. I contend that they are hard at work, but they simply have found the route of leading people to anti-spiritualism to be an easy temptation in our context of modern thinking and science.

While at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, I had a professor whom I very much enjoyed learning from. His name was E. Allen Sorum. Professor Sorum was an older, burly man with a huge heart for evangelism and cross-culture ministry. In his role at the seminary, he often worked with people from different cultures who desired to become WELS pastors. In these experiences, Professor Sorum learned that these people had a different view about the presence of evil spirits than many in our context.

This service and knowledge led Professor Sorum to write a devotional book entitled, *2000 Demons: No Match for My Savior*. In this devotional, Sorum lays out the fact that demons are real. Yet, the comfort is far greater because Jesus has authority and power over them.

Dear Christians, we must acknowledge that the spiritual forces of evil are real. Do not be taken in by our culture that wants to downplay their presence. The devil is your enemy. Demons are working to lead you astray. You must be cognizant of this. Failing to recognize the presence of evil spiritual forces leads to a failure to listen to God's instructions to resist them, as is written in James, "*So, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7)

A failure to recognize the reality of evil spiritual forces could lead you to be little threats. Ouija boards, mediums, and tarot cards can be doors to connecting with these evil spirits. Do not connect with them. Also, I would encourage you to avoid media that belittles the power of demons, such as ghost-hunting television shows and many horror movies. Do not put your guard down regarding these evil spiritual forces.

The devil and the demons do not only attack you in the obvious forms like demon possession. The covert attacks of the devil are likely much more prevalent. These evil spiritual forces can tempt us to think like the demon said to Jesus, "*What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth?*" A huge temptation of the evil spiritual forces is to disconnect you from Jesus. Why do they do this? Many Americans have fallen to this attack. In a recent book, entitled *The Great Dechurching*, it is shared that 40 million Americans have been dechurched. This means that they used to attend church at least once or twice a month. Now, these people don't go at all. The devil's goal was to separate them from Jesus and his Word. Why would he do this? Because he knows that Jesus is the Holy One of God. He knows that Jesus has authority over him and the demons. He wants to separate you from Christ so that they can get a hold of you. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "*Do not give the devil a foothold.*" (Ephesians 4:27)

As baptized children of God, you belong to him, not to the devil. So, I am warning you to continue to resist the devil. He works hard against Christians. He wants you to suffer in hell with him. Do not think that there is no threat at all because you are at church. Remember, this man who was attacked by a demon was at the sanctuary where Jesus taught with power and authority. Christians, the devil prowls around you. Resist him. Do not give the devil a foothold.

Although the devil is powerful... although the demons attack... remember that your Savior Jesus is much more powerful than they are. **Jesus has authority over even the demons.** In this gospel, we saw that Jesus drove the demon out with a short phrase. Jesus said "*Be quiet! Come out of him!*" and drove the demon out. Jesus demonstrated his authority over the evil spiritual forces with this act.

Jesus has authority over the evil spiritual forces. He also has the grace and love to do something about their attacks for you. On the cross, Jesus defeated the devil and these evil spiritual forces. In giving himself up to death and rising again, Jesus won the victory. The devil attacked Adam and Eve with his lies and Jesus crushed that serpent's head on the cross. This is what Jesus has done for you. He has defeated your enemy, the devil. Now, he rules over you.

Jesus has ultimate authority over the spiritual forces that may attack in this life. He also has authority over every demonic attack and lies that you see in this world. So, where the devil, this sinful world, and your sinful nature conspire to attack you, look to Christ Jesus. Jesus has won the victory. The devil is bound. You belong to God. So, you can live confidently because **Jesus has authority over even the demons.**

Many in our culture have been tempted to deny the existence of evil spiritual forces. We, who stand on the Bible, know that they are indeed real. Yet, we have confidence in the face of their attacks because of Savior is greater than them. Jesus defeated the devil on the cross. Jesus rules over us eternally. **Jesus has authority over even the demons.** The lake of fire, hell, is the devil's home. He is being tortured for eternity. In Christ Jesus, your home is heaven. Jesus will bring you there. Amen.