

**Title: “Beyond Amazement”<sup>1</sup>**  
**Text: Mark 1:21-28<sup>2</sup>**  
**Epiphany 4 and January 29, 2012**  
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A dear friend, mentor, and teacher of mine, Pastor Norb Oesch, shared the story of a flight he was on, a number of years ago. *It could have been just another long leg of a journey— uneventful and unfulfilling. Instead it turned out to be exceptionally stimulating, enlightening, and thought-provoking. The gentleman I sat next to was Japanese—distinguished looking, well-dressed, and, as I was soon to find out, articulate. He was manager of the department of governmental affairs for a very large international firm. Mr. Kenji had a global mind; he understood events in history as they affected not just a single country, but the whole world.*

*As we talked, he quickly stated how blessed the United States was, what potential, what enviable resources and influence it had. But with sadness he shared how its position in the world was deteriorating. It had been passed by in many areas of technology and influence. Then he said, "But you know, you have every ingredient necessary to make your nation the utopia of the world, primarily because you have Christianity. If only all who claim to be Christians would live like Jesus, you would solve every social, political, and even economic problem in your country.*

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<sup>1</sup> PR: CP 85:50

<sup>2</sup> Scripture readings, unless otherwise noted, are taken from The Holy Bible:English Standard Version © copyright 2001 by Crossways Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

***He lived as every human ought to live. His life is the solution to your country's problems. And I say this not being a Christian myself."***

***What a powerful testimony, I thought, and yet how sad. Here is a man who highly admires Jesus and His teachings but has not yet known Him as his Lord.***

I'd like to share a similar story with you. This one, however, predates Pastor Oesch's story. In fact, it goes back to Mark chapter 1.

***They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.<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> Immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. He cried out,<sup>24</sup> "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 out 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.***

## AMAZEMENT is not Enough

Our text is the story of millions of people today. Not the part about demonic possession – though there certainly is enough of that, too – but the part about what the people in Capernaum thought of Jesus, certainly fits many people today.

Look back at the incident in our text. What happened? Jesus spoke with authority, He backed up His Words with action. No wonder they were amazed! We aren't told how long the man possessed with the demon had been around Capernaum, but it is obvious, everyone was familiar with him, and no one had been able to do anything about him.

The Rabbis and other religious leaders could not effectively quiet the man, their words were hollow, just words. Jesus speaks a few words: **“Quiet,”**<sup>3</sup> **“Come out, now,”**<sup>4</sup> and the impossible becomes reality. And the people were amazed!<sup>5</sup> No kidding! Amazement led to recognition of Jesus as one with authority<sup>6</sup>, but that's where it stopped. It's one thing to “talk the talk,” the Rabbi's were good at that. It's quite another to “walk the walk,” to address the problem with authority, to handle the problem that is unsolvable, that is exactly what Jesus did.

I read a very interesting article this week in *Sports Illustrated*. Mohammed Ali turned 70 this week. I

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<sup>3</sup> Φιμώθητι

<sup>4</sup> ἔξελεθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ

<sup>5</sup> ἐθαμβήθησαν

<sup>6</sup> ἐξουσίαν

remember when the young Cassius Clay started spouting his poetry, ***“I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee...”*** calling himself ***“the greatest.”*** I didn’t think much of him at the time, arrogant, brash, and then when he changed his name and adopted the Islamic faith, I thought less of him.

Today, as I look back on his career, one thing is for sure, as a four-time world champion he backed up his words with action. His actions gave his words authority, today no one laughs or scoffs about what he could do. For Ali, amazement at his talent is all he could hope for. For Jesus, however, amazement was not what he sought.

### **AMAZEMENT – Not what Jesus Wanted**

Did you happen to catch the question asked by the people of Capernaum in verse 27? It is very telling. ***they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? ...”*** Wrong question! Listen to the rest of the verse: ***“What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”***

“What” was the wrong question. “Who” is this, is the right question.

“What” was a natural question. Really it was the same thing as the demoniac had asked, ***“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”*** It’s the question every sinner asks, ***“What would you do with my life, Jesus?”*** It’s the relationship issue.

It's taking Mr. Kenji's knowledge about Jesus and opening the door for him to move to a completely different place.

Mr. Kenji, and the folks in Capernaum, and many others in the world put this much together: Jesus was a great teacher, Jesus was an amazing man, He was a great moral leader, one whose ideas merit consideration. Knowing all of that, however, is not what Jesus desires.

### **The Realization all sinners must have ... Jesus Has come to destroy**

The demon in the man at Capernaum understood the essential truth, and he asked: ***Have you come to destroy us?*** Underlying the question was the challenge: does Jesus have the power necessary to destroy Satan's power within us? The demon saw this as a matter of life and death, and that demon was right.

### **Jesus Has come to destroy, that He might Save**

***<sup>25</sup>Jesus rebuked [the demon], saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"*** There would be no discussing this matter. ***<sup>26</sup>The unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.***

When the Holy Spirit begins the process of bringing a person into the Christian faith, the action is confrontational. Carry that forward to today in your life and mine, every time the Holy Spirit is at work building and

strengthening our faith, overcoming the evil one, defeating the demons within us, the action is confrontational.

I have often thought how nice it would be to have just one day where there was no confrontation, no war between Satan and God in my life. Then I realize, that day will come. It's the confrontation Paul speaks of in Philippians: ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.<sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.<sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.<sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.<sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.<sup>7</sup>***

### **Jesus has come to Save**

The choice we face is of the uttermost seriousness. Will Christ work living, dynamic, faith in us? or, will we merely be amazed at what He did? Will you confess with all confidence, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>8</sup>*** or will Jesus just be a great teacher to you? Will you grow each day in the confidence that says, I trust in Him who said and asked: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”<sup>9</sup>*** Will you, turn to

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 1:21-25

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 16:16

<sup>9</sup> John 11:25-26

Him who says to you: ***“I [have come] came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly.”***<sup>10</sup>

He invites and assures us: ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”***<sup>11</sup>

If all I ever do is admire, adore, and be amazed by Jesus, I will never end up in heaven. If He continues to build up and work faith in me, then no matter how challenging it may be, I will live in the sure promise given by my Savior: ***“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”***<sup>12</sup>

He has given us this new birth in Holy Baptism. He has made us His children. He has promised to work in us, and He will live up to His promise.

Pastor Oesch closed the story of his encounter with Mr. Kenji in this way: ***Mr. Kenji confronted me with a Jesus to be admired. But before he left the plane, he was confronted anew with the person of Jesus as Lord. He was left asking the crucial life-or-death question, What, Lord, do You want with me?***

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<sup>10</sup> John 10:10 paraphrased

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 11:28-39

<sup>12</sup> John 3:18

***If he lets Jesus cast out all unbelief and replace it with faith, Mr. Kenji will have life, life in all its fullness. What a joyous day that will be! It's the same for you and me. If we permit God's Spirit to move us beyond amazement to faith in Jesus, we too will be healed, made new in the person and work of Jesus. God grant this to us all for Jesus sake. Amen.***