

Mark 1:29-39 – Quiet Preaching

It has been said that there is no such thing as bad publicity. It has always struck me as odd that Jesus told so many to shut up about the things they knew of Him. Why is Jesus shy about free publicity? Even His disciples were told not to speak of some of the things they had seen and heard in Jesus. The demons, who know exactly who Jesus is, even better than His disciples, are told with even greater authority to be quiet. Mark says that Jesus would not permit the demons to speak because they knew Him.

Jesus will not be rushed in His path to the ultimate self-revelation of the cross and empty tomb. In fact, Jesus will not turn over the agenda to anyone but carefully and deliberately reveals Himself, almost painfully slow. The Kingdom of God cannot be rushed. In a world where fast food is king, where you do all your business online to avoid waiting, where medicine promises immediate relief, and where time is money, Jesus breaks all the rules. He is too slow to get to the punch line.

They had been at the synagogue. It was Jesus' practice to be at the synagogue. Let me put it into modern terms – Jesus did not miss church for any reason. He left the synagogue with James and John and they went to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a fever. Jesus risked all propriety and went over to the sick woman, even taking her by her hand, and lifting her up. And in doing so, her fever left her and she immediately returned to her vocation – she served Jesus and His disciples. There are those who would make this out to be somewhat demeaning to women but it is not. This was her vocation. Jesus removed what kept her from her vocation. And that is exactly what He does for us.

The news spread. By evening the whole city was literally at their door. Everyone who was sick and everyone who was oppressed by a demon was waiting outside the door for Jesus to do His stuff. And Jesus did His stuff. The miracles that so fascinate us and the demons cast out and commanded to be silent.

To us these things seem like side shows. We make distinctions between the miracles and the casting out of the demons and the preaching of the Gospel. But not Jesus. All of these are the preaching of the Gospel. After a long night, Jesus took off early in the morning while it was still dark. He went to a desolate place to pray. But the side show had not stopped. Simon scolded Jesus. "Everyone is looking for you." It is as if he is saying, "You brought this on yourself – all this grandiose business of healing the sick and casting out demons." Peter finds this a distraction, just like we do. But not Jesus. They are all one in the same – this is all the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is resting up because He must go on to the next town and the one after that. He has a ministry and purpose to fulfill. He is come to preach and this preaching is also healing the sick and casting out demons. Jesus has come just for this. There are no distractions from this purpose and no demons will be allowed to sidetrack Jesus from His purpose.

The demons knew who Jesus was and is but they did not see it coming what Jesus was to do to silence them once and for all. The demons were reliable witnesses for who Jesus was and is but they did not see coming what Jesus had come to do. The demons were still in the dark with respect to the cross. They did not realize that Jesus had come exactly for that cross. In their eyes the cross was the end, the silencing of Jesus once for and all and the death of the Son of God and of any hope for redemption for us.

Jesus silenced them because He would not be distracted from the purpose for which He had come. The cross was certainly in the cross hairs of the future that was to come but before He would meet the cross, Jesus had the kingdom to preach. He preached the kingdom with the words of His mouth and with the actions of healing and casting out demons. By both the actions and words, Jesus reveals Himself as the Lord who comes down from heaven in order to deliver His people from their enemies. It will happen on the cross but when the Lord determines the moment is right.

We live in a world that loves demons in the movies but is not so sure they exist anywhere else. At the same time, we see a world wrestling with evil that we cannot control and groaning at every new horror of breaking news that shakes our comfortable worlds. We don't want to believe they are real but we suspect that they are whether we want to admit it or not. How can people do such evil things? Terrorists cannot simply be driven by ideology; they must also be driven by demons. The new illnesses that arise just when we seem to get the old ones under control cannot simply be accidents; they must be gifts of the evil ones. The shock of a society in which children in their mother's wombs can be discarded like trash and aged can be given drugs to hasten their death and put us out of our misery of waiting for them to die cannot be progress; it must be a sign that demons are real and all around us.

We know where demons are. What we need to learn is where they are not. Demons cannot exist where Christ is. They cannot exercise power over Christ nor can they exercise power over those who belong to Christ. With Luther we sing, *"though devils all the world should fill all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He's judged the deed is done. One little Word can fell him."*

We know where demons are. What we need to learn is where they are not. Where Christ is, sins are forgiven and the chains of a shameful past are broken. Where Christ is, the ills of this body and this world are undone by the eternal healing not even death can touch. Where Christ is, demons tremble and they are not permitted to speak. Only one Word is said. The Word that is Christ, the Word made flesh, whose living voice still calls them to silence.

I have come to preach, says Jesus. This is why I am here. And still He preaches. He preaches in baptismal water. The first thing in the baptismal rite is the casting out of the devil from the one to be baptized and the marking with the sign of the cross over heart and head. Jesus is still casting out demons and His Word prevents them from saying or doing anything against His own children by baptism and faith. The demons are silenced in Christ.

I have come to preach, says Jesus. This is why I am here. And still He preaches. He preaches in the voice of absolution that undoes all the knots of our past and releases us from all the chains of our failures. Where Christ is, sin can no more accuse us and we wear the righteousness that no sin can spoil or spot.

I have come to preach, says Jesus. This is why I am here. And still He preaches. He preaches in the gift of bread that is His body and of wine that is His blood. Here we meet the medicine of immortality. Illness and affliction can trouble us but they cannot steal the life that Christ has prepared where illness, affliction, and death have no place or power.

I have come to preach, says Jesus. This is why I am here. And still He preaches. He preaches the new found purpose of our lives, lived not to satisfy the whims of the moment or a heart of sin but the noble vocation of husband serving your wife and wife serving your husband. He preaches the vocation of family and of the noble service of parent to your child and of children to their parents, that makes the house the domain of the Lord and a place of blessing and love. He preaches the vocation of love for neighbor not because you like them but because God was your neighbor in love who rescued you and bound your wounds.

And now you preach. In your homes and where you work, in your neighborhoods and the communities where you live. You preach the Word that silences the demons and sets us free to fulfill God's bidding. You preach Jesus Christ not as you feel Him or imagine Him but as He has revealed Himself at the manger and in the cross, Christ and Him crucified. You preach Jesus Christ in words of faith that pray and witness and in lives that mirror this self-same Gospel. Where once Jesus commanded silence, now He commands us to speak of Him. Of His cross. Of His salvation. Of hope that cannot be silenced anymore.

We know where the demons are, alright. And we know what ills trouble our fragile bodies and frail minds and hearts. But we also know where Christ is, in Word and Sacrament. And where Christ is, the Spirit is at work for us, preserving us in faith and keeping us in Christ. Where Christ is and the Spirit is at work, demons are silent, sins are forgiven, the sick are healed to eternal life, and the dead are raised never to die again.