

Bennoch church 29th January 2012

Imagine the scene, the sermon has just finished and the preacher is suddenly interrupted by a man who enters the building and screams a question towards the preacher. People turn and whisper, who is this man, what does he want, how will the preacher answer? They are afraid and curious at the same time. The elders on duty make a move to have the man removed. We can't have such interruptions here. Others tut, this is a church, how dare he storm in and ask such a question. There is anger in their words.

I remember as a probationer at temple Anniesland church being a 'plant' one Sunday morning, near Christmas...

Jesus had just amazed the people of Capernaum with his teaching in the synagogue. It would have been normal practice for Jesus to attend synagogue and as an adult Jewish male he could exercise a teaching ministry or possibly he had been invited as a visiting teacher. We are told that he does not teach like the teachers of the law, but he teaches with authority. This is what amazed the people of Capernaum who gathered to hear Jesus speak that day.

As people are reflecting on his words, a man enters, described as having an evil spirit. His specific condition is not important, possibly some form of mental illness. Interestingly, Jesus does not bring in 21st century knowledge into the encounter – he was a man of his time and accepts people's understanding of this man's condition at face value. The key thing here is the question he asks. It gets to the

very heart of the matter. Read v 24. We are back to the ancient idea of knowing someone's name as being important, to have power over them. This insight or recognition is understood as coming from outwith the man. It is supernatural. What we have here is a battle between two spirits or two kingdoms, the Kingdom of God in Jesus and the Kingdom of Satan, in the man with the demonic spirit.

In this encounter the Kingdom of God is victorious, for although the spirit recognises who Jesus is, he does not power over him. One of the interesting threads that run through the gospels is the idea of what is known as the messianic secret. Jesus did not want people to truly recognise who he was until the time was right. If recognised too early and seen as a threat, his death would have been premature. In fact, this revelation of who he was, did not happen for his closest disciples until Mark 8 at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter recognises Jesus as messiah. But here, right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is recognised, so the command is given, 'be silent'.

As the man is released there is the violent sign of spirit leaving as he screams and shakes. This is a miracle of healing but one of wholeness, both physical and spiritual healing coming together. Both are important to Jesus, for any form of pain, physical, mental or emotional, like death, are seen as intrusions and not part of the fabric of the Kingdom of God.

Now the people are really amazed, his command is authoritative. He simply orders the spirit out, and it leaves. So they start talking to one another, read v27 and the fame of Jesus spreads through the close knit villages of Galilee.

I wonder what we should take from this story of the 'battle of the kingdoms'? First of all, wonder did not lead to belief and miracles do not always lead to faith. Sometimes they are given to people who have a glimmer of faith already. A woman who stretches out her hand to touch the hem of Jesus garment, a Roman officer who said, only say the word and it will be done, the daughter of Jairus raised from death, two blind men who cry out for healing on the Jericho road and request their sight.

Secondly, God will always be victorious; even when look around the world and think that evil seems to be winning? Faith is both about how we live our lives today, in the face of good and bad, and the 'end game', where the Kingdom of God will be ushered in.

There is a final point, we know the name of Christ and who he is; he does not ask us to be silent, so let us proclaim his name and his victory over death.

Amen