

Mark 1:21-28

Some years ago a phrase that was sometimes said to a person who was unwilling, or unable to speak was: "What's the matter...cat got your tongue?" No one knows how this phrase came to be, although we do know it has been around longer than any of us. A similar phrase could very easily come out of our Gospel reading for today. Not "cat," but "What's the matter...demon got your tongue?"

The demon in our text could speak. It controlled the tongue of the man it possessed. When Jesus was in Capernaum, teaching in church, the demon used that man's tongue to say, "*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.*"

That was no kitty cat speaking; it was one of the devil's angels--an unclean spirit. This demon knew exactly who Jesus was, and it wasn't afraid to say it. But Jesus shut the demon up, and quickly: "*Be silent,*" He said, "*and come out of him!*" Crying out, but without a word, the demon came out of the man and was gone.

Now if you have ever seen wildlife shows on television, you may have seen naturalists catching and then tagging an animal. They, then, release the animal back into the wild, but because there is a tag on its ear, or somewhere on its body, they can go back years later and locate the very same animal. In Capernaum, Jesus tagged that demon. He ordered it to be silent. He did not say, "Shut up for a few hours!" He did not specify a period of time that the demon could not speak. He simply ordered the demon to stop talking. A few years later we find the demon that Jesus had tagged. In Luke 11:14 we see Jesus casting out a demon that, Luke says, was mute. It was unable to speak. Why not? Because Jesus at some point, perhaps here in Capernaum, had told it to "*Be silent!*"

This demon is still around today. Maybe in Capernaum, maybe here in Augusta. It was in church there; it could be in church here. But if it is, it is unable to speak. Jesus ordered it to be mute. Makes you wonder...when church members close their hymnal and refuse to sing, and when they do not join in with the congregation in confessing their sins, and confessing the Christian Faith, it might be appropriate to ask them, "What's the matter...demon got your tongue?"

But isn't it true that there are times for all of us when that mute demon has our tongue? When we fail to speak up and contend for the Faith when it's attacked, but instead we remain mute; when we fail to say that we're sorry to someone we have offended; when we fail to speak the word of forgiveness to one who has sinned against us. Yes, I'd say that mute demon certainly spends a lot of time here with us, the people of Christ Lutheran Congregation.

Yet even though people around us might wonder if a demon has our tongue, it doesn't. Jesus does. Although we at times give the devil use of our tongue, your tongue belongs to your Lord. And not just your tongue; Jesus has your heart and mind, body and soul. Everything that you are belongs, not to the devil, but to your loving Lord.

Before it was ordered to be silent, the demon asked Jesus, "*Have you come to destroy us?*" Our Lord did not answer the demon one word, but He gives us the answer through His apostle John: "*The Son of God appeared for this purpose,*" writes John in his epistle, "*that He might destroy the works of the devil.*" Satan and his demons have one goal and purpose--to destroy you and me in hell. That's why he brought sin into our world. All the misery and violence, the beheadings by ISIS, the sufferings of God's people, can be traced back to him. Satan and his angels are pure evil. But your Lord and Savior is pure goodness and mercy.

When you were brought to church for Holy Baptism, the devil confronted Jesus just as he did in Capernaum with the words, "What have you to do with us, Jesus?" At that time in your life, you belonged to Satan. You were his possession, for we all are from birth. The devil was angry that you were being brought to the life-giving waters in the font. But Jesus did the same thing He did in Capernaum. He told Satan, "*Be silent, and*

come out of him!” And at that moment you belonged to Jesus. Satan no longer had possession of your tongue, or your mind and heart; no longer did he possess your eternal soul, for you became God’s child.

“*Be silent!*” Jesus ordered the devil in your baptism. No longer can Satan speak to accuse you. From the time of your baptism, and from that day on, it is Jesus who now speaks, not the devil. He speaks to His Father on your behalf, “This one belongs to Me, dear Father, he/she is My child and has a place with Me in heaven.” He speaks to you through your pastor, “I forgive you of all your sins. I died for you. Here is My body and blood given for you as a sign that you belong to Me. Satan cannot have you, for you are Mine.”

Now I have to tell you, and surely you know this, that the devil is not one to give up. Look how bold his demon was in Capernaum, to sit there in church and rudely confront Jesus through that poor possessed man.

All of you, because you belong to Jesus, are targets for the devil and his demons. And their works are evident in our lives. We have dear members in our church family who are severely oppressed right now by these evil spirits. Some in our midst are shedding tears of grief as they struggle with their loved ones. Some in our midst are victims of violence and are suffering for doing the right thing. Some in our midst are struggling with pain and illness. Others with loneliness. Still others with depression.

We all struggle with the temptations the devil puts before us. Some in our church family have fallen deeper than others through temptation. This is not a time to point and blame. It’s a time to pray and encourage, for we are God’s family here, and we support each other in our struggles with sin and Satan.

The devil never gives up, but neither does Jesus. He did not quit in His journey to the cross for you. He did not quit when the devil severely attacked Him. Your Lord triumphed over your sin. You are forgiven. He triumphed over death. You have a living Lord who is, for you, the Resurrection and the Life. He triumphed over Satan and his evil angels. Jesus has authority to shut Satan’s mouth and to prevent him from taking you back.

That demon in Capernaum knew who Jesus was. But so do you. And in a way that demon never will. Many years ago two boys were rescued by a fireman. The one boy was amazed by that fireman. The other boy was surely amazed as well, but even more because that fireman was his dad. Do not fear Satan and his evil angels. Jesus has complete authority over them. And you, friend, you belong to Jesus, for you know Him in a special way--you, whom He rescues day after day, are His dear child. Amen.