

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

[An Ordinary Sabbath Day]

For the Jews living in Capernaum in 30 A.D., it was an ‘ordinary’ Sabbath day.

‘Ordinary’ families made their way to the ‘ordinary’ synagogue for ‘ordinary’ prayer;

‘ordinary’ men stood on the stone floor,

‘ordinary’ women and ‘ordinary’ children climbed up to the balcony.

Jairus, the ‘ordinary’ leader, greeted other ‘ordinary’ men as they came in.

(Mark 5)

No one thought it strange when an ‘ordinary’ carpenter came up to read
from the ‘ordinary’ Torah scroll that was reverently kept behind two...
well, rather ‘extra-ordinarily’ ornamented doors.

No one would have thought it strange

had that carpenter explained what He had just read,

adding a few words of admonishment.

That would’ve been ‘ordinary.’

After all, the synagogue was for ‘ordinary’ people.

It was led by ‘ordinary’ men.

They would half-sing, half-chant the words on the scroll—

much the same as we Christians did earlier today. (Though much less melodic.)

Then the leader might talk about what it meant; not unlike our Bible Studies.

Traveling rabbis might come to teach now and then,

But rabbis were just teachers; they didn’t have *authority* like a priest,

who sat in the ‘Chair of Moses.’

There were no priests at any synagogue—there was no need.

Priests were for making sacrifices;

sacrifices only happened at the great, one-and-only Temple in Jerusalem.

Jews in Jerusalem *might* go to the Temple on an ‘ordinary’ Sabbath.

But folks way out here in Capernaum? Couldn’t possibly make that 80-mile trek each week.

Even most of the Temple priests were part-timers in those days,

working a few weeks each year, attending synagogue with the family for the rest.

John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, was one of them.

‘Ordinary’ Jews spent their ‘ordinary’ Sabbath at the ‘ordinary’ synagogue.

They heard God’s Word, prayed, and returned home to rest.

[Astonishing!]

It was an 'ordinary' Sabbath day.

Then that carpenter from Nazareth did something astonishing.

When He spoke God's Word, He proclaimed it with authority.

He didn't quote any of the great rabbis who commented in the margins of the scroll.

He didn't merely repeat what others said.

He taught directly on God's behalf.

And what He taught was astonishing, recorded just six verses earlier:

*"The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel."*

(Mark 1:15)

It was the continuation of the message John the Baptist had preached before his arrest.

That the kingdom of God was at hand,

That One mightier than himself was coming to baptize not only with water,
as John himself did, but also with the Holy Spirit.

John preached about the wrathful judgement that was at hand,

The ax that was laid to the root of the tree,

The 'end' that every demon in Hell knew was coming.

Therefore, there had to be repentance,

and that was where John's message stopped:

"The kingdom of God is at hand; repent!"

(Mark 1:4, Matthew 3:2, Luke 3:3)

But that carpenter completed the teaching:

*"The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent **and believe in the gospel.**"*

(Mark 1:15)

It was astonishing.

It was even more astonishing than the demon who showed up while He was teaching.

The demon knew what the establishment of God's Kingdom meant for him.

The demon knew this 'ordinary' carpenter was the King of kings,

the Creator of the Universe,

the Lord Almighty,

"the Holy One of God."

(Mark 1:24)

Evil cannot persist in the presence of God.

To the demon, seeing Jesus in the flesh was pure terror.

Jesus shut up the demon with a simple command,

drove it out of the man,

and resumed His teaching.

*He was **astonishing**; He was God—He is God!*

And He had come in the form of this 'ordinary' carpenter from Nazareth.

[Truly Astonishing!]

Jesus could have made Himself known to us in the same way the demon knew Him.

After all, are we so different from a demon?

Do we not act against God's will?

Do we not sin?

Do we not recognize, as the demon did, what we *truly* deserve in the presence of God?

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" (Mark 1:24)

He could have followed John's message of repentance with *justice*,
but He completed it with a promise of *forgiveness*.

Jesus did not reveal Himself to destroy us, but to make us new.

So that we might know Him:

He was born an 'ordinary' baby,

in an 'ordinary' stable,

worked as an 'ordinary' carpenter,

in an 'ordinary' town called Nazareth,

and went to an 'ordinary' synagogue,

like any 'ordinary' Jewish man.

Jesus did not *"come [to us] in terror,*
 as the King of kings,
 But kind and good,
 with healing in His wings;

Sharing with us *tears for all woes,*
 a heart for every plea.
 [He] comes, the friend of sinners.
 [He]... Abide[s] with me."

...and with you, and with all who trust in Him.

As proof of His great love for us, He even received the destruction that we deserved.

He died on the Cross to redeem sinners like us.

That was what He came to earth to do:

To be Priest and Sacrifice and Temple all in one.

That is the great 'Epiphany,' revealed in His first coming.

Jesus did not come to destroy you as the demons, but to create you anew.

In Jesus, God offers protection and comfort

to you and to all who suffer attacks from the world's demons:

the abused, the outcasts,

those suffering under the weight of guilt for things they've done.

He is truly *astonishing*!

[Called to Live Astonishing Lives]

He has made our bodies into His Temples.

He Baptized us not just with plain 'ordinary' water,

but also with the very Word that He spoke on that 'ordinary' Sabbath, 2000 years ago.

And as that demon learned, His words have authority.

Christ's words for us are astonishing; believe them.

Only "Repent, *and believe the good news!*"

Listen to those powerful, authoritative words of God saying:

"You are forgiven."

Let them stream into your anxious and timid heart

so you can believe in Him with such a deep faith and joy

that everything else becomes '*astonishingly ordinary*' in comparison.

You'll find yourself freed to live a life of thankfulness and praise.

You'll start to live as fearlessly as the old hymn says:

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;

Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.

Where is death's sting? Where grave, thy victory?

I triumph still if Thou abide with me!

Not even death and the grave can separate you from the love of Jesus.

That's a message that's worth sharing.

The Gospel lesson ends with Jesus' fame spreading "everywhere throughout the region."

Do the same today.

You don't have to go far.

You know someone who needs forgiveness.

Share those astonishing, authoritative, yet ordinary words with someone in your life:

You are forgiven.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
