

Mark 1 Unclean spirit

In our Gospel lesson Jesus is on the north shore of Galilee, at Capernaum. In the synagogue, the gathering, he is teaching with authority, unlike the scribes: The scribes need to say silly little things like we do, “God says this, God says that.” Not to mention they may have been quoting from Mishnah, unscriptural writings or oral traditions from the intertestamental periods. But that is not what the people were hearing that day. Not in that synagogue. Someone gets up there and says, “I say to you...” That is a teaching with authority.

And we of course, know why Jesus gets to say, “I say unto you,” as opposed to “God says unto you...” And that is because he is God.

Though I suppose someone, or rather, something else in that synagogue already knew that. The unclean spirit, a demon, cries out that Jesus is the Holy One of God. It knows where Jesus’ authority comes from, from God. And it is terrified of it. Which is our first sign that this demon will not be able to match authority with Jesus, the Holy One of God.

And we of course see this little battle play out, and not surprisingly to us, as we have read in chapter 1 about how Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons in the wilderness, we see him triumph handily over this demon, he rebukes him, tells him to be silent, and sends him off, to leave the poor possessed man cleansed.

We smart Americans don't talk much of demons. But I am not so sure how smart that actually is. Yes we like our empiricisms, and believe me, I do more than most. And, again, the empirics of the spiritual realm are tough to measure, but does that mean there isn't one?

We know God is real, this all got here somehow, outside the laws of physics, outside the space time continuum, this is not God of the gaps "we haven't figured it out yet," no, this is relativity: space and time *are* linked –and it all had a beginning, so what caused it? This is thermodynamics: matter is neither created nor destroyed. This is what science shows us, and yet it's all here, so something outside it all had to bring it about. And so we know God is real and we know He is Spirit, outside space and time, though, as we confess with joy, he does take on flesh and dwell among us. And so in that sense we know the spiritual realm is real and interacts with us.

And then, well, there are some interesting stories to say the least, usually from the global south where the demons, I think, have more reason to "show their hand" as they trick people back into idols and ancestor worship. Paul in a way touches on that in our epistle lesson – we know that there is only one God, yet some are still working through that, and the demons are at work.

But lets not pretend that what you see on your news channel, with the darkness, and hatred, and butchery of war, and the perversions of truth, and the trafficking and the prejudice and the false teaching, and the astounding rates of depression and lost identity, and the spirituality of the crystals, and the cabals, and the worship of celebrity or politician... are we really going to say the devil isn't at work here?

I think the devil is quite fine with people not believing in him as long as no one believes in God, but, if I am honest, I think he is showing his hand pretty brazenly now. There is certainly, certainly, an unclean spirit upon the hearts and minds of the world, yes, even us westerners as "puffed up" with knowledge as we are.

Now, I should probably clarify. The person in our text today was clearly possessed. The demon was in him, which is why Jesus tells the demon to come out of him.

And I certainly see no reason why the fallen angels, demons, wouldn't be able to possess nowadays. Though I won't claim nearly enough expertise to diagnose such a thing. For that you better call a missionary who's lived it – and we do have those by the way.

Furthermore, for a baptized child of God, lets not forget that in baptism the Holy Spirit is promised. We see this in Acts 2:38 "Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In fact, the historic baptismal

liturgies often included “Depart unclean spirit and make place for the Holy Spirit.” That’s an exorcism, folks! And so for the Baptized Child of God who is a temple of the Holy Spirit, can they even be possessed at all? I think not. Some other faithful pastors may disagree. But I would agree a Christian can be oppressed, as opposed to possessed, by unclean spirits. In fact, as someone in ministry and having gone to seminary, I daresay I fully expect any child of God to have more attention from the demonic. They don’t have to work as hard on Hollywood, they take the bait hook line and sinker and they show off their demonic rituals, excuse me, “grammy performances” – remember that one from last year? But the demons do have to work extra hard on you. And they have all the more incentive to work on you, because you will receive the inheritance they won’t, and they don’t like that.

So we typically in these sermons go to, rather good places I might point out – not to oujia boards, or crystals, or even our own good works, that’s nonsense and the devil will trounce you if you go there - no, we go *extra nos*: to the help God offers from outside of us. We go to the armor of God and the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word (Eph 6). We go to his promises to never leave or forsake us (Heb 13:5) and to not let the gates of hell overcome his Church (Matt. 16). We go to his promise to bind up the strong man, the devil, and steal us away from him (Mark 3). We go to the table where he promises to strengthen us in his body and blood that

we receive into us (1 Cor 10 and 11). We go to that same baptism where he gave us his Holy Spirit.

Those are real good place to go folks. And we see that in our text today. How does Jesus treat the unclean spirit? He first tells it to... (forgive the strong term, but I think it makes the point better) he first tells it to shut up. Then he commands it with His Word.

And, children of God, who are not possessed by an actual unclean spirit but by the Holy Spirit, in times where the evil one is assaulting and oppressing you and throwing your doubts, fears, sins, and your uncleanness in your face. Perhaps one thing we can try, in the middle of our self-justifications and defensiveness and our excuses or despair, is to shut up. And let Jesus do the talking.

What does His Word say about your sins? It says they are bad, for sure, that's the law, and it is true. But does his strong, authoritative word say that they are forgiven? Yes it does. "Having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" Col. 2:14. They are nailed, dead, and to be remembered by God no more! And so we rejoice in the absolution. Let it be the authoritative word of God. And if it is, which it is, why should God's voice of forgiveness be drowned out by a demon's

rabble rousing – no way, not in that synagogue in Capernaum, not here in Idaho Falls!

What does God's authoritative word say about your doubts? That he is the truth (John 14:6)! That his word is truth (John 17)! That he will not put out the flickering flame or break off the bruised reed (Isaiah 42). That he rejoices in mustard seeds (Matt. 17). That he commends those who say, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9)! Let him speak in your doubt.

What does his authoritative and strong word say about your depression and despair and the hopelessness that is choking you? Does he not say that he works for your good (Romans 8). Does he not say that he will care for the sparrows (Matthe 10), and you are of much more value to him than they are – so much he gave his only Son! Does he not say that the darkness cannot overcome him (John 1)? That he has overcome the world (John 16), he has overcome death (John 11)! He will make all things new (Rev. 21)! Don't let the darkness drown out the light which God's word brings.

What does he say about your uncleanness? All in me are a new creation (2 Cor 5). Though your sins were scarlet they will be white as snow (Isaiah 1). He offers you a wedding garment washed and made pure in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7). It will

cover all your shame. He says he is “faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1).

Today we hear the Word of the Holy One of God, who has come to destroy the evil one and his minions and in his cross and empty tomb our Savior has opened for all his people, all with faith, all claimed by him, he has opened for them (for you!) a kingdom of purity, goodness, rejoicing, and life.

I close with a quote from Luther who had more than a couple battles with a spirit of uncleanness:

“So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: "I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!”