

“When Demons Come to Church”¹

Mark 1:21-28

Please pray with me....Lord, open my mind and my heart so that I may hear with joy your Word for me this day. May the meditation of my mind be acceptable to you as your words fill me with your holy presence. In Jesus’ precious name, amen.

“21 They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, "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." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching-- with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.” (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

CHILDREN’S MOMENTS – (*Invite the children to come and sit while the scripture is read and have a bag of garbage as a prop*) – ask, “How many here help your mom or dad by taking out the garbage? Some of you do that right now, some of you will probably begin doing that as you get bigger. Have you ever noticed that if the garbage is closed up in the bag you can’t tell that there is stuff in there that really needs to be gotten rid of? It’s kind of like this bag; we can’t really understand why it’s so important to get rid of it because it doesn’t look like it’s a problem and doesn’t seem to be smelly or anything. But if we opened it-what? You don’t want me to open it? Why? Oh, it would stink. Well, you’re probably right. What would happen if we never took out the garbage? (*Let the children give there responses and repeat them so that the congregation can hear.*)

Rachel read a story about Jesus teaching in the synagogue a place kind of like our church. People were listening very closely to what Jesus was saying. There were all kinds of people there listening to Jesus. Some may have been sick in their bodies, not feeling too good but wanted to be there to honor God and to worship God. There was also a man there who was sick in his spirit; he had garbage on the inside that nobody could see; he looked okay but he didn’t act okay. That trash inside him made him scream at Jesus and sort of stopped Jesus from preaching. But Jesus didn’t make the man leave the place where people were

¹ Title comes from the title of Jerry L. Schmalenberger’s sermon in his book *The Miracles of Jesus and Their Flip Side*, Lima: CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 2000, 35.

trying to worship God. He did what I know many of you would want to do. Jesus helped the man to get better. Jesus made the garbage come out of the man so his spirit could be well again. Sometimes we act like we have trash inside us. Sometimes we say things that hurt people's feelings or we get mad and hit someone and then we feel bad about it later. Jesus can help us clean out our trash too. We let Jesus do that by praying and asking Jesus to forgive us when we say things we shouldn't or when we get really angry and hurt others because we want things to go our way. Let's ask Jesus the help us keep the garbage out of our spirits. Let's pray (*pray and echo prayer where the children can repeat what you say*).

I want you all to know that the sermon title this morning is no reflection what so ever on the day – Father's Day. When I was planning this sermon series and picking titles for the messages I had not realized that this sermon would fall on Father's Day. It was brought to my attention later by a couple of people who had read the titles in the bulletin and wondered what my intent was going to be today. So this is a disclaimer about Father's Day and demons – there is no correlation and yet...there just might be...for *all* of us not just for the dads.

When we come to church we come with all kinds of issues such as the argument that happened just before walking out the door to get in the car or the fact that maybe being on the golf course would be a whole lot more inviting than sitting through a sermon that just might go too long. We all have things within us that keep us from actually being here...in the moment...present with our Lord. However, for the most part we don't let our inner turmoil break out and disrupt the service. We hold it in and either tune out what is going on around us or find a way to slip off into a nice restful sleep.

I have been in worship though were there was a person who continually disrupted the worship service making it impossible for the service to go on. This person would stand up and scream at the preacher. This person would get up and go up and grab a microphone and begin singing a different song than the choir was

singing. This person would try to hurt other people that tried to stop the disruptive behavior. It got so bad every Sunday that the police was called to take the person from the worship space. I remember thinking that what we needed was Jesus to come and take the garbage out of the person who had come with demonic ranting. I don't recall the people of the church or the pastor who was caught off guard again and again every just stop and try to pray over the individual during the service. I wonder still today what would have happened if that had been done; if we who were witnessing the incident had called upon Christ to cast out whatever it was that was causing this person to create such a ruckus. I do know that lots of prayers happened on behalf of the individual after the police had been called and the person had been taken off the premises. I do know that months of prayer and discussion about what to do occurred until the person was allowed to worship with the community. And I do know that the person never disrupted the service again, in that church or any other after several months of daily prayer for the healing and wellbeing of the individual.

We later learned about the mental problems the individual had. Today when we read a miracle such as the one that the writer of Mark presented we can usually conclude that the person with the unclean spirit, or demon as Luke says, has some sort of mental disorder such as schizophrenia or by-polar disease. We would conclude that Jesus just addressed what people believed in those days and brought peace to the person who was screaming out at Jesus. And we know that Jesus does bring us peace, peace deep in our very beings if we let him.

This miracle story tells a couple things about our Lord. First it tells us that Jesus is concerned about the whole person. Jesus wants us to be well physically, mentally, and spiritually. It also tells us that Jesus doesn't throw a person out of the church because he or she causes a ruckus. Jesus helps the person to calm down

and to be renewed in his or her spirit so that he or she may continue to be part of the community of faith.

But here is the flip side of the miracle that Jerry Schmalenberger talks about in his book that inspired this sermon series. But I still wonder if we had stopped to pray the first time it happened, the first time that individual screamed out, if all the other incidents would have been avoided; if that person would have been made whole by Jesus Christ, if the “demon” or “unclean spirit” had been cast out.

I agree with Schmalenberger that the church does and should attract all types of persons from misfits to malcontents to egomaniacs.² And because we do, there will always be those who cause a ruckus in church, maybe not like the man in Mark’s miracle story, but a ruckus just the same. What better place for these people to be than in the Christian communities of people that understands about forgiveness and do-overs.

I used to think that demon possession was a very primitive belief. Yet somewhere in the back of my brain I still wonder. I wonder if there are forces today that are bent on stopping the spread of Christianity. I wonder when I see on the news that some believe that the way to have a perfect society is by slaughtering all those who don’t fit in with a particular “code” if demon possession is more than a primitive thought. What is it that makes some people want to harm others to gain power no matter who has to be mutilated in the process. What possesses a person to think that strapping a bomb to his or her body will bring them bliss in life after death? We use that phrase all the time, what possessed him or her to do such a thing.

Jerry Schmalenberger tells about his experience preaching while he was in Liberia, West Africa. He said that while he was preaching through an interpreter

² Schmalenberger, Jerry L., *The Miracles of Jesus and Their Flip Side*, Lima: CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 2000, 37.

into the Loma language the Wozi sent a “Lion” a dominating, intimidating, disruptive individual to try to scare him away. He said that every time he preached they would play drums and danced outside the building trying to drown out the gospel that was being preached. He said he witnessed first hand how demonic actions could try to stop the good news of Christ, but that the Holy Spirit enabled the message to be heard any way.³

There is a strong power in the world today, in our very community, which works against God. The writer of the book of Jude talks about those who will come into the church dressed like everyone else with the sole purpose to sway people away from following Christ, to disrupt worship of God and peace in our lives.

There are numerous stories of Jesus’ casting out demons in the New Testament. This is just the first incident, the beginning of Jesus’ battle against the forces that would prevent Jesus’ ministry from taking place. What if there really is some force that seems to take possession of us that keeps us from hearing about the love of God and that fact that God is here present with us and has not abandoned us to this world of suffering and pain with no hope. If these “what ifs” are real then thanks be to God that Jesus is here to say to that which has tried to take over inside of us, “be quiet and come out!”

In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ Ibid. 38.