

## Mark 1: 21-28

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

<sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

<sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

### Trinity Presbyterian Church

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#### “The Song Stuck in Our Heads”

A few years back, heard a man testify about his struggle with addiction. He said it was a time “when the devil rode on my back.” He said he would slip into church on Sunday mornings, sitting in the back row. He’d try to listen to the sermon and sing songs, but he said it was hard to concentrate while twitching for a fix. Said he went to church because at the end of the service, the pastor would always invite people to come forward for a prayer if they needed it. Every week the man would come forward because what he desperately needed was more than a warm hello, or a reminder God loved him. What he needed was for Jesus to free him, to heal him. When we listen to the strange story in our bibles, Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit *in the synagogue—in the church*. What is the man doing there? Wonder, if he too was looking for a healing.

Now it might sound strange to our liberal ears, but we’ve all been there. We’ve all longed for Jesus’ to heal us or our world from unclean spirits. Perhaps we have absorbed an unclean spirit from our past which bends us toward a sense of worthlessness. I know there are times when I have. The negative chatter rings in my head as the “self-critical committee” gathers for their weekly meeting to kibitz about all that I am not, rather than all that I am. And I need Jesus’ to stop the evil loop in my head. Or maybe it is an evil that has been done to us. A memory about a time when we were treated less-than-human. In the Journal today was an obituary of a twenty-two-year-old woman who was an academic honor roll student and model to society. But after a sexual assault after high school, she couldn’t cope with the trauma. So she turned toward heroine and ultimately chose suicide to quiet the voices. There are too many faces of young tormented souls in the obituaries these days. How many prayers have their families spoken, asking for Jesus to heal them? And then there is the demonic violence in our world. Young men shot at parties and a gymnast coach who molests 150 young girls, and then the

people who knew and yet still covered it up. Friends, what other word is there but evil? I think we all share the same prayer. Desperately longing for Jesus to heal our world from the unclean spirits.

Turn to our bibles and Jesus' first action in ministry is to restore a person from the evils which are hell bent on robbing him of life. It is the first thing Jesus' disciples witness. The scene is rather intense. There Jesus is preaching a synagogue sermon—probably getting a few “Amen’s” and “Tell it like it is, preacher!”—when a man who has been fidgeting in the pews, stands up and interrupts: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you going to destroy us? I know who you are, Holy One of God!” Sidenote: only the demons and marginalized people know who Jesus truly is in Mark's gospel. “I know who you are, Holy One of God!” Without missing a beat, Jesus silences the parasite, casts out the spirit. The man convulses, yells a scream which could peel the paint straight off the walls. Everyone's spine is tingling, their eyes are as wide as ping pong balls. The poor children are clinging to their parents. They are all left wondering “What kind of teaching is this?” It does not take the overly observant to realize that this is not your typical Presbyterian Church service. It is quite the first scene. Jesus healing at high noon in the synagogue, in a showdown with evil.

But before we get too carried away, let's take a step back. Ask what does the healing mean? If Jesus heals with a word and the powers lose their grip on our lives, how do we interpret it? We may have to follow the bread crumbs through the Old Testament, all the way back to the beginning of creation to understand. Remember, in the beginning God casts out the chaos with a word of life. Creates the thick jungles in India, the white tundra in Alaska. The penguin, the fruit fly. The purple flesh of the plum. God singing the refrain, “You are so good, you are so good, you are so good, oh so good to me.” Then at the crescendo of creation's song, God creates us with fingers to wiggle, tendons that stretch so our elbow joints can move. Hands with the power to heal and hold. And then God imparts God's image in us, singing the same melody: “You are so good...” And God sings it to us so many times, the hope is the song gets stuck in our heads. Have you ever gotten a song stuck in your head? “You are so good...” Except, sadly, we all know there is louder music out there: war songs, political songs, fear songs. It is clear we do not care about each other the way that God cares for us. Rather than creating beautiful harmonies of diversity, we choose the dissonance of demonizing the other side. So when Jesus heals, it is more than providing a cure for the problem. Jesus' healing is about restoring us back to the image of wholeness. Back to the song that God has been faithfully singing to us ever since the beginning. “You are so good...”

Well guess who has the same authority today? Is it not the church's ordained calling to, first and foremost, be a people of healing?

Is it not the church's ordained calling to use its resources and Spirit-talents to labor toward

helping God to bring wholeness to the world?

Is it not the church's ordained calling to cast out the evils of racism, to tell hatred that it's time to pack its bags—move out! To exorcise the demons of capitalistic greed and patriarchal supremacy?

Do we believe we have such authority?

Do we believe it is the church's purpose to be an oasis of relief for those who live in the deserts of poverty?

Do we believe it is the church's purpose to embrace the image of God in all who different than us, or uncomfortable to us, or are even those who are against us?

Jose was a heroin addict, gang member whose tattoos sleeved his arms—he even had a few inked tear drops running down his cheek. When he was six years old, his mother would tell him, “Why don't you just kill yourself, you are such a burden to me.” At the age of nine mom was tired of being a mother so she dropped him off at an orphanage. It took 90 days before his grandmother figured out what had happened and picked him up. Upon returning home his mom regularly beat him. He wore three t-shirts every day to school and well into his adulthood years to cover up the wounds. One day he found healing in a church that ministers to gang members. Miraculously, one at a time, the layers began coming off. Today he tours the country sharing his story. He says, “I used to be ashamed of my wounds, but how can I help the wounded if I don't welcome them myself?” Someone who once heard him could only describe his story in this way: “The room was filled with awe after his teaching.”

You know, I hear a lot of talk these days about how the church has lost its authority. How we've lost the ability to leave our people with a sense of awe. How the gospel no longer holds the efficacy to be relevant in people's lives. How the church does a far better job of hurting people than it does at healing them. Who can argue? But it all makes me wonder: has the church lost its authority? Or have we simply lost touch with how we are called to use it?

*“You are so good, you are so good. You are so good, oh so good to me.”*