

## 4th Sunday Epiphany B 12

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January 29, 2012

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

This is such an amazing story, listen to it again.

Were you at the synagogue in Capernaum yesterday? Did you hear about what happened? Well let me tell you, and I am not sure if my words can clearly explain what took place. I mean nothing has ever taking place like this before and in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Worship started off like any other week. A routine, normal gathering that ended up anything but normal. That is it was a usual Sabbath, we arrived and gathered and heard the usual prayers, the reading of the Psalms and of the Torah. Then about that time when we all break out to hear the different rabbis teach. The time when we hear them talk about that the scriptures are saying to us. The Rabbis are all good men with much to say, but sometimes it seems like they say the same old things.

Well anyway. Suddenly there was a noisy crowd around a new teacher who came in. I must say there was something different, not about what he said, but the way he said it seem to move all those listening. There was energy about him like I had never experienced before, he had some kind of authority that the others did not have.

When suddenly this strange man came up to the crowd around him and started screaming. No one seemed to understand or know what provoked this man to suddenly start hollering out loud. Then he pointed at the teacher and said 'what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?' His voice was shrill and sounded sort of demonic-like as he screamed.

Then as I was wondering how this man knew who the teacher was, how did he know this rabbi's name? I was pondering what he meant when he asked ,

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‘have you come to destroy us?’ when he screamed out again. This man you might only describe as having an unclean spirit within him started blaspheming and using the name of God. He said, ‘I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’ With that everyone seemed to get quiet and take a step back.

That is when this teacher, this Jesus of Nazareth, stepped toward the man.

Jesus seemed angry and took offense that he had been called the Holy One of God. Then the teacher with more authority and power that I have ever witnessed pointed back and commanded; ‘Be silent and come out of him.’

At that point the whole place became silent, everyone’s attention was focused on this man. When suddenly he fell to the ground and the screams and screeches that came from him was like two spirits fighting one another.

When all of a sudden what must have been the evil spirit came out of him and he went calm and quiet on the floor. A couple of others helped him up, he seemed as normal as you and I are, even as the buss around the room kept growing as people began asking, ‘who is this who teaches and commands such authority?’

How could this man have such authority over the unclean spirits that they obey him? What I am telling you is the truth. I am not lying, go ask anyone else. Even today I have continued to hear others telling this same remarkable story, I tell you this Jesus of Nazareth is now famous all across the region.

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What a remarkable way for the Gospel writer to begin his account of the life of Jesus. Here the evangelist, Mark wants to make clear to us who Jesus is. Here we are once again told that Jesus is the Holy One of God. This time it is not a voice from heaven claiming Jesus as the Son. There is no innocent

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dove gently floating down alighting on his shoulder. There is a confrontation with an evil spirit seeing beyond the human flesh naming Jesus for who he is.

It is a fascinating story, which begs the question. Why would the gospel writer chose this miracle as the first act in the worldly ministry of Jesus? If Jesus taught with so much authority and power then why did he not tell us what Jesus said or about the what he taught?

A few weeks ago we read the account of the baptism of Jesus, how as he came up out of the water the Spirit of God descended upon him, only to have the Spirit immediately push him out into the wilderness to battle the evil one. Here again we find Jesus in the real world we experience every day as we battle the demons and evil spirits which seek to enslave us.

Some of you may already in your mind be compiling a list of things which possess you. Many others of you are saying, 'I have no idea what you are talking about pastor.' But the reality is we all become possessed now and again. For some it is a daily and hourly battle with an addiction to alcohol or tobacco or drugs or gambling or shopping or eating or exercise. For you to beat this evil spirit that possesses you, you need your higher power, your God to strengthen you and call it out.

But how about the rest of you who are still wondering seeing you being possessed in any way? Are you ever possessed by greed or envy or jealousy or pride or anger? These are often the socially acceptable spirits that possess us that we don't admit to. Yet they can be destructive as well. When we speak out in anger against a friend or family members saying things we do not really mean. When we let greed or envy get the better of us we can become bitter against the other we perceive is getting special treatment. Can you say that is not true in your life at least once in a while?

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To me this is why the evangelist, Mark chose this as first of the miracles Jesus performs. For Jesus is fulfilling in a real way what we pray for each week in the Lord's Prayer as we ask God to 'deliver us from evil'. Which in the Greek is better translated, 'rescue us from the evil one.'

Jesus wins the battle for us, he commands the evil ones to leave us. This is the victory Jesus won for us on the cross. This is the gift we received when God gave us the Holy Spirit to possess in the waters of our own baptism.

Yet this battle continues to be a daily and hourly confrontation with the evil spirits which surround us. But thanks be to God we do not have to be afraid or to walk alone. For this Holy One of God continues to break into our world, to set us free from that which seeks to bind us and to exorcize his power and authority and rule in our lives as well.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael