



## **EVERYTHING**

Today, we encounter Jesus' activities through the gospel of Mark. I'm sure that most of you are aware that events in Mark's gospel happen "immediately". There's this urgency that draws the reader along at a rapid pace. Our pericope today is no exception. It's not exactly clear in English but in the Greek we learn that "Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and immediately the Sabbath came." Jesus went to the synagogue and taught. Now, I'm not exactly sure how the previous teaching went. But obviously Jesus' teaching far surpassed anything that the people had ever heard before. The writer of Mark tells us that the people were amazed by his teaching because Jesus taught as one with authority and not as one of the scribes. Perhaps the people were wondering, "Now, wait a second. He doesn't hold any office or anything. He's not a priest. He's not a member of the religious elite. He's not a judge. And, yet, his words touch us. He speaks, and his words penetrate our hearts. Where did he get his authority!?"

Jesus' teaching amazed the hearers because he taught as one with authority and not as one of the scribes. Now the scribes taught from memorization and by regurgitation. They were able to recite the sacred texts and basically repeat what the Rabbis had already said. But when Jesus taught, something happened. Let's take a look at the passage. (Vs. 23) Here, we experience another "immediately." Immediately, 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, you are the Holy One of God."

I don't know about you but I find it very intriguing that this unclean spirit would proclaim Jesus' holiness. I love it. Here we have a holy man, in a holy place, on a holy day no less and Jesus encounters this person with an unclean, an un-holy spirit. Well, certainly there are many other questions that come to mind. You know, I used to read this passage very differently. This is how the scene would unfold in my mind. Jesus is preaching and teaching his heart out in the synagogue. The faithful people are sitting in the synagogue amazed and astonished by the majesty and wisdom of Jesus. Then all of a sudden, this demon possessed, spawn of Satan burst through the doors, foaming at the mouth, head spinning around, body levitating. The people scream in horror, grabbing their children. Then the demon cries out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, you are the Holy One of God." Then Jesus leaps to his feet and zaps that demon right out of him – complete with Hollywood special effects. But in preparation for this sermon I read a commentary that posed a question I never considered. What if this man (not an evil man - but a man with an evil spirit) what if this man went to the synagogue every Sabbath? What if he stood at the door and greeted people every Sabbath? What if he helped collect the offering every Sabbath. What if he was a fixture in the synagogue? Ahhh- but this Sabbath there was a new teaching and the unclean spirit could not remain silent.

A point of clarification Jesus was not concerned with coming into contact with the unclean. And it's a good thing, too. Finish this sentence for me. "One bad apple.....spoils the whole bunch." Yeah well that was basically the order of the day in biblical times. If you touched anything or anyone that was unclean then presto change-o you became unclean as well. But thank God for Jesus because Jesus turns that whole situation around. The good apple, (that would be Jesus) is thrown in with the rotten apples, (that would be us) and instead of the rotten spoiling the good, the good redeems rotten. Oh this is a new teaching indeed. Jesus certainly doesn't appear to be the least bit concerned about coming in contact with someone who is unclean or sick. In fact, Jesus makes it his business to see that this person is liberated from the bondage of this demonic torment. Jesus is not afraid to minister to the unclean, the outcasts. Are we? Here we see Jesus ministering to a person who is possessed by an evil spirit. I mean really. What does it mean to possessed? Perhaps Hollywood has polluted our understanding. Have you ever lost your temper? I mean really lost your temper. Blood pressure elevated, colorful language, the volume turned all the way up. And when you come back to yourself and calm down you say, "I can't believe what came over me!"

Let's get back to synagogue and see what Jesus does. (vs 25) "Then 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." See this is that authority that amazed the people. When Jesus spoke, things happened. Jesus told the evil spirit (if you'll allow me to paraphrase) "Shut-up and get out!" And the evil spirit obeyed. Well, it didn't go quietly. But it did indeed go! I find it interesting that the only recorded words that we have from Jesus in this passage are in essence, "Shut-up and get out!" I wonder what unclean areas in my life need this kind of straight talk. Well, I'm in the right place because Jesus is not afraid of the dirtiness of life.

So we can see that Jesus' actions are contrary to religious and even social expectations. And that's the thing with Jesus. We like to see Jesus as sweet savior who was humble, meek, and mild. But in reality, Jesus was an active advocate, a liberator, and at times even a rebel. In all of the Gospels each writer has stories where Jesus is taking the status quo and turning it upside down. (Or right side-up depending on your vantage point.) Jesus was not afraid to stand up for what was right even when it went against tradition. Jesus was not afraid to act justly even if it would offend those in power. So, the question that this passage raises for us is: Are we more concerned with public opinion than God's opinion? Are we more concerned with not offending people instead of embracing those whom society would rather ignore? Are we loyal to Jesus and our baptismal calling or are we more loyal to our political affiliations? The gospel makes the answer obvious. Doesn't it? Jesus doesn't care whose feathers get ruffled because he healed on the Sabbath or was in the presence of an unclean spirit because Jesus was about building God's kingdom. I heard a pastor say that Jesus was also more concerned with who got the cure than who got the credit.

Some of us are in need of healing. Some of us have unclean areas in our lives—areas that only Jesus can touch. We've kept secrets from loved ones for far too long. We've even tried to keep secrets from ourselves. And yes, we've even tried to keep secrets from God as well. But be encouraged because for those of us this gospel is truly good news. Jesus is not afraid of our circumstances or situations. Jesus is not afraid of the thoughts that we want to keep hidden or the attitudes that we conceal from others. Jesus is not afraid of us and our mess. The rotten have been redeemed. There is nothing that we can confess or even think of that would shock God. Now I'm not saying that the journey to wholeness will be easy. I mean, remember the man from today's lesson, "the unclean spirit, convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, before it came out of him." See the journey may be difficult but the God we serve is gracious. The journey may be bitter, but the God we serve is so good – sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb. And the journey may be daunting but the God we serve is powerful. And greater is the One who is in you than all of the evil in this world.

Our God is powerfully present in our lives through the person of Jesus the Christ. And the God of the universe continues to manifest God's presence in our lives, even the unclean parts. It is this divine presence that is our source of joy, power, and authority. Sisters and brothers, our God is faithful and our God continues to direct us, teach us and cleanse us. Remember the question the evil spirit who was present in the Sabbath worship asked Jesus? The evil spirit asked, "What have you to do with us?" Now, if *we* were to ask that same question of Jesus, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, what have you to do with *us*?" Jesus' response would be, "Everything!" I have everything to do with you because you were created in my image." Jesus, what have you to do with *us*? "Everything! I have everything to do with you because you are fearfully and wonderfully made." "Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, what have you to do with *us*?" "Everything!" I have everything to do with you because I love you with a never ending love and nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us, not evil spirits, not unclean spirits, not depression, not oppression, not divorce, not financial woes, not hatred, not sexism, not heart disease, not diabetes, not cancer, not loneliness, nothing! Nothing can separate you from the everlasting love that I have for you. What does Jesus have to do with you? EVERYTHING! Sisters and brothers, the rotten have been redeemed.

Let the church say **AMEN**.