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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Jesus' Word Casts Out the Unclean Spirits

Mark 1:21-28

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark 1:21–28

²¹ Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. ²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

²³ Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are — the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. ²⁷ Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." ²⁸ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

Jesus' Word Casts Out the Unclean Spirits

1. The evil spirits in the Church
2. The evil spirits in our lives

In the name of Jesus, at which name, every knee will bow, dear fellow children of God,

The synagogue was the center of religious life. And the center of the synagogue was the Word. Men, women, and children sit on benches which line three sides of the stone building. Along the fourth wall flames dance upon a seven-branched lamp stand set near a reading desk which sits on a center platform. The reading desk is where the scroll is unveiled and presented to the reader. When the reading of Scripture is completed the scroll was returned to the Ark, and the speaker of the day invited to give his teaching on the text. The eyes of all are fixed on the center platform. The synagogue was the center of religious life for the Jews. And the center of the synagogue was the Scripture which now touched the mind and lips of the chosen speaker.

Today we will explore two ways that the devil tries to take the platform; how he tries works through human beings and his evil demons to take center stage and lead us away from Christ. One way is the false teachings that evil spirits bring into the church. The other is the evil spirits that invade our daily lives. Only the Word of Jesus can cast them out.

Let us pray, Lord, cast out what offends, and let Your Spirit enter in. Amen.

1. Jesus' Word casts out the evil spirits in the Church

It was a great privilege to take that platform, to be in the center of religious life. And with that privilege comes great responsibility. And with great responsibility always comes to potential for abuse; the potential for evil. So John writes in his first letter to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). What he is saying is, examine the teachings of those who speak the word of God to you. What sort of spirit is speaking? So John goes on to warn us, "because many false teachers have gone out into the world."

Many evil spirits have gone out, and they work through flesh and blood teachers to take center stage in the Church. Consider a few examples:

Along comes a scribe who wants to take the platform. His is an expert in interpreting the Scripture in light of the traditions of the elders. To compare, in many ways he is like the Catholic priest. His knowledge of church tradition and canon law make him an exclusive expert in God's counsel. You like him because of how pious he is; if anyone is truly spiritual, it is him; he has dedicated his whole life to helping others and serving God. If anyone is close to God, it is him and without him, you would be lost.

But God says, test the spirits.

Next comes an episcopalian bishop. She takes the platform next and begins to speak. You like her because she is politically correct. She doesn't segregate or accuse. She preaches against discrimination, intolerance, and sexism. And she doesn't get into theological debates. You hardly ever hear any talk of hell or damnation. You like her because when you leave, you find your confidence has been boosted and you feel more comfortable with who you are.

But God says, test the spirits.

Then there comes a mega-church pastor. He takes center stage and it was like he was born for this. He shines in that spotlight. You are captivated by his personality and you hang on his every word. He is so in touch with what is going on in the world and his everyday applications speak directly to your life. He's such a good communicator that by the end of his sermon, you are ready to do whatever he says.

But God says, test the spirits to see if they are of God, for many false teachers have gone out into the world.

To preach the Word is to stand on the platform of Christ. It is not about how intellectual or spiritual your pastor is; it is not about how politically correct or feel-good your pastor is; and it is not about how captivating a speaker he is or how much you like his personality. What matters is what is in the center.

And this particular Sabbath, all eyes are on Jesus. Jesus is in the center and his listeners line the walls surrounding Him, attentive to His word. There is something to His teaching that is unlike anything they are used to. It shocked them in fact.

Jesus speaks with authority. He does not rely on the traditions and interpretations of the church. He does not speak of theological opinions or what is politically correct. He doesn't rely on his oral communication skills or personality. And this is what shocks you. He quotes Scripture with such simplicity that there is no escaping it. He is controversial and what he says is unpopular with many of the religious class.

It makes you squirm a little in your seat. You convulse within, because you know he is speaking to you. He is revealing things about yourself that you don't want to think about. There is such authority to Jesus' preaching that there is no place to escape. No where to hide. And you are left at the mercy of God.

"Be silent! Come out of him!" But Jesus would not let these evil spirits alone. For where Jesus spoke, they had to shut up. And it is that word and that mercy which saves us; it is that authority, which speaks not as the scribes; but which actually has the authority to forgive your sins; to declare you righteous. Here, with Jesus at the center there is no room for the evil spirits to speak; there is no room for false teaching; they are silenced and Jesus' word has cast them out. What joy to know that when all human traditions, all human appeal, all false teachings are cast out of the church, all that is left is Jesus and the congregation that surrounds him and hangs on his every word.

2. Jesus' Word casts out the evil spirits in our lives

We have dealt with the evil spirits that threaten the church's teachings; what about the evil spirits that threaten our lives.

For the man in our text, this was a daily struggle. Demons had taken over his body. We call this bodily demon possession. We don't know much of it in our day. But we should not assume it does not exist. Just come to our services at North Aurora Care Center and you might wonder. Let me share a story from my Seminary days of working.

While I was going to school in Seminar, I worked a part time job as a Medical Van driver at a nursing home. There were three floors to Syverson Nursing Home. The lower level was for short term rehab; the second and third were long term. The second floor was for residents who were functional; most of them could communicate and were able to feed themselves. But the third floor was for the others. These clients were those who had need of 24 hour care. They couldn't feed themselves, they couldn't go to the bathroom by themselves. Some of them couldn't even be left alone in their room.

I remember the day I met her – sitting in her padded wheel chair, white drool on the side of her mouth; face down cast; groaning and crying. Almost non-stop, she would just sit in the hallway moaning. They said she had been like this for weeks. And I was the driver scheduled to take her to a doctor's appointment.

Was it demon possession? Was it a psychological disorder? Who's to say? Now, they didn't train us to do exorcisms in Seminary. But I felt like I had to do something. So I thought, if this was an evil spirit, what better thing could I do than to speak the gospel to her. So on the way back I told her about Jesus and His cross and His resurrection and that He is Lord of all.

We got back to Syverson and I climbed into the back to unlock her wheel chair. I told her I would pray for her; and there I had a prayer. I prayed that if there was an evil spirit God would cast it out; and if not, that God would relieve her of this disease. I prayed that He would free her – either by curing the illness, or taking her to be with Him in heaven. It was almost eerie how she stopped crying. For the first time since I picked her up, it was silent. She looked me in the eye and reached out her hand to touch me. I learned a few weeks later that she had passed away.

I don't know exactly what was happening behind the scenes. But I pray that she is with the Lord now. And I know that Jesus' Word has power.

Now may not run into any one who is bodily possessed like the man in our text, but we may find evil spirits in our lives in other ways. In fact, any way that the devil might

devise to lead us away from Christ is a threat from evil spirits. As we said before from Ephesians chapter 6, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Those spiritual host of wickedness have many ways in which they find their way into our lives.

Maybe it's temptation. They might use the internet to entice you into sins against your spouse; sins against your own body. They insert TV commercials which entice to think nothing of a woman or man wearing next to nothing. They want you to think its ok to look; its ok as long as no one gets hurt.

Maybe it's by pawning off evil as if it were good. How much the media that we are glued to displays sin as if it were just a means of entertainment: the gory murder drama that lures us into this world of lies and adultery; or the evil horror movies which portray demonic activity as if it is something to entertain us.

Or maybe they find their way into your life through the relationships with people around us. They mess with you; they bring out the worst in you; they get you so bent out of shape that ungodly things start flying out of your mouth.

And God forbid they find a way into your mind. They will torment you. They lead you into deception; to manipulate those around you; into complacency with sin – and if not dealt with, you will find you don't even know the difference anymore – the difference between what is wrong and what is right.

But there is good news. And the good news is that they know who Jesus is. They know better than we know – that Jesus is the Holy One of God and His word has the power to destroy them. They plead for Jesus to leave them be; to let them go about their business; to continue on – "Leave us alone!" they cry.

But Jesus will not leave them alone. For this is an exorcism. We are here to put Jesus in the center and let Him speak. And where he speaks, they must obey.

"Be silent! He belongs to me! She is mine! You cannot have these for whom I've sacrificed my very life. I have purchased that body and soul with my own blood. Sin can no longer rule where I am Lord. I have risen from the dead and I am Lord of all. You will not possess what belongs to me. You will not corrupt what I have cleansed. I have forgiven their sins and they are mine. Come out!"

There is shaking, convulsing, crying – it is painful for us to lose what once held us so tightly. But there is no other way. That evil spirit must be dealt with. There is shaking, convulsing, crying – but when it is over, suddenly all is quiet. Suddenly there is peace. There is peace for this man. There is peace for you. Live in that peace.

Silence the evil spirits by putting security restrictions on your internet usage. Silence them by shutting off that violent show or not going to that new horror movie. Silence them by not giving into the hostile conversation with your friend or spouse. Silence the spirits by hating the deception that holds you captive. Silence them, by reminding them who Jesus is. Your Lord and Savior.

For now Jesus is at the center. He stands at the center of religious life. In this church; in your lives – it is Jesus' word which reigns. But it goes beyond this church. It goes beyond these walls. Now it spreads. Immediately His fame spreads throughout all the region around Galilee. But of course, for us, it is not fame Jesus wants. He wants His word to spread. In this church, in your lives, and beyond. Be a temple. Be a place for Christ to dwell so that wherever you go you bring the Holy One with you and wherever you see those evil spirits arise: silence them with the Word of God. Then the word will spread and more will come to gather – all eyes on the center platform. All eyes are on Jesus. Amen.