



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

POSSESSED

Sermon for 1-29-12

Scripture: 1 Cor. 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Because I left on Christmas day for a month away, I have missed much of the season of Christmas and Epiphany. This year Mark is the suggested gospel, and I want to tell you a bit about that book. Mark was written first of the four gospels in our Bible, probably around year 70 about 40 years after Jesus was crucified. It is our shortest gospel. It doesn't have any story of Jesus' birth. It doesn't waste any time getting to the teachings of Jesus. In the first 20 verses of this gospel we have been told that Mark is writing about the good news of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. The author introduces John the Baptists--his appearance and his work of baptism. Next we are told about John baptizing Jesus followed by the voice coming from heaven saying to Jesus, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Then we have God's Spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness with an encounter with Satan. After that Jesus announces that the presence of the Kingdom of God is right now and calls us all to repentance. Next he begins to call his disciples. Wow, what a lot of material for just 20 verses!

In today's reading we have the story of Jesus' first sermon, the surprise of his listeners that he spoke with such authority, and then his casting out demons or an unclean spirit in a man who was present at the synagogue on the Sabbath (maybe his first miracle?). Evil Spirits, Satan, exorcism, possession. I bet you never expected that I would be preaching on this topic. Many mainline Christians do not even believe in evil spirits or even evil for that matter. My interest in demonic powers goes back over 25 years as I worked as a therapist with a woman who was diagnosed as having multiple personality disorder, now referred to as one of the



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dissociative identity disorders. Several of her personalities seemed to be “unclean Spirits”. During that time I read Scott Peck’s excellent book, *People of the Lie*. Dr. Peck, a psychiatrist well known for his book, *The Road less Traveled*, discusses both human evil and demonic evil, including his experience with exorcisms. I highly recommend the book to you. In the Roman Catholic Church, there are specific priests who are trained in exorcisms. For a while I did a lot of reading and attending workshops on this subject until it really became too much for me to handle. Evil in any form is hard to handle or to try to treat. At the point when I started throwing salt around my office to ward off evil before seeing this client, I decided I’d better not get into exorcism or evil any deeper. I did continue to do therapy with this client who did make some progress in integrating or getting rid of some of her many personalities.

In this sermon I do not plan to talk about the Hollywood type images of demons that cause one to vomit, make weird sounds and spin heads around but instead I want us to look at evil and demons as defined by David Lose as “forces that are diametrically opposed to God's will. Rather than bless, they curse; rather than build up, they tear down; rather than encourage, they disparage; rather than promote love, they sow hate; rather than draw us together, they seek to split us apart.”¹

When we look at possession in this way it is no longer a foreign experience; instead it is something that is quite familiar to most of us. Einstein says it is difficult to drive out unclean spirits, difficult but not impossible. What unclean spirits might be in us according to David Lose’s definition? Are we possessed by arrogance, or poor self-image? Maybe self-righteousness or fear of failure? What about jealousy

¹ David Lose, *Dear Working Preacher*, 2012 online.



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or anger? I can remember in my early single days being possessed by the desire to have boyfriends and how much time I spent doing unhealthy things such as going to Happy Hours, dating several men at a time, focusing on and discussing romantic relationships ad nauseum. I would imagine that most of you have had experiences of feeling possessed by something that is not the Spirit of God blessing us or us blessing others. For some the possessions may be more serious, such as addictions to drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography or gambling.

There are so many things that can be destructive. Here I am drawn to Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians. He says that we know that there is one God from whom all things come and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist; however, some folks do not have this knowledge. We as followers of Christ must be aware of not doing things that would weaken others' faith. A secular example could be that you know having an alcoholic drink or two would not do you any harm; however, if you are in the company of a newly sober person who might still be in the temptation phase, it would be best to order a non-alcoholic beverage instead. This corresponds to Paul's advice about what foods to eat. Let's not get caught up in rights and wrongs but remember to be sensitive about how our actions might affect others.

Thinking again about being possessed by things that are disparaging of our self or of others, I invite you to think about and then write down on the piece of paper in your bulletin what, if anything, is possessing you at this time. Naming can be the first step in getting rid of what is distancing us from God's will. Fold up the paper and put it in your pocket or your purse; later take it out and talk with God about it. Let's not wallow in self pity. We can use the very words of Jesus to say to our inner voices "Be silent, and come out." (Mark 1:25) Instead of being possessed,



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we can take possession of ourselves and instill a new spirit within us. Let us all pray for each other that whatever we have silently spoken or written here today will loosen its hold on us. We may have good intentions and then get sidetracked into falling back into the old ways of thinking and being. I ask you to remember that what we cannot do alone we can do with the Spirit's help. In Mark we read about powerful words and actions that promise God's kingdom. The author of Mark says that Jesus spoke with authority. This is not the authority of a judge or police but the authority of wisdom and integrity that may be found in the humblest and poorest people in our world.

Undoubtedly there will be many words spoken from the pulpit this Sunday, much information shared. What I hope and pray for is a beginning of transformation, not just for us as individuals, but for us as a community, for us as a church. Then they will know us by our love. Jesus' says in John 13:35, "This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." As Paul writes, "If you have to choose between being loving and being right, be loving." My family in Christ, let us amaze the world with our love and our faith. Amen and Amen