

**“Silence!”**  
**Mark 1:21-28**  
**Sermon #87**  
**4th Sunday After the Epiphany**  
**47th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic**  
**1.31.21**

**Mark 1:21-28 CEB**

21 Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. 22 The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. 23 Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, 24 “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 from God.”

25 “Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” 26 The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.

27 Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves,  
“What’s this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands  
unclean spirits and they obey him!” 28 Right away the news about  
him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our  
hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our  
Redeemer. Amen.

I remember the first time I actually dissected today’s verses. It was  
about five years ago and this was our scripture to translate and

interpret in New Testament 1. I had just discovered why I loved the Gospel of Mark my whole life, so I was ready to jump in.

This passage is chock-full of images. Jesus casts out unclean spirits, the afflicted man seizes up in terror, people in the congregation are shaken to their core, the spirits even know who Jesus is, and Jesus takes full control of this potentially dangerous situation.

I'm not sure if this is a story that people go to for comfort. It's not like John's recording of Jesus' first sign turning the water into wine at Cana or his first detailed miracle in Matthew where he heals a man with a skin disease. It is, however, almost exactly like the first miracle in Luke.

Yet, with all the mess Mark 1 presents to us-a screaming man with an unclean spirit attempting to throw this moment of worship into chaos-Jesus stands firm. When the forces of evil attempt to harm or destroy, Jesus stands resolute because he is the Son of God proclaiming the Good News of God's coming kingdom where evil will not and cannot exist. Jesus stares down these demons without second-guessing himself and demonstrates how God is on the loose in this chaotic world.

There are some other things to note in Mark 1:21-28. This first recorded miracle in Mark comes at the heels of Jesus' first words to trust in the Good News of God's kingdom and the call of Simon, Andrew, James, and John. And in this moment in the oldest of the four Gospels, Mark chooses this "encounter with the demonic

power of evil” to open our Savior’s earthly ministry.<sup>1</sup> And it is here that the dichotomy of the “holy one from God” and the unclean spirits give us a glimpse of the ongoing cosmic battle. Yet, this story reassures us that the battle that made an explicit appearance in Mark 1 is a battle that has already been won by the Son of God. With words, Jesus demonstrates his power over an already defeated enemy that will continue to face humiliation and defeat until Christ comes again in final triumph over these wicked forces.

Now, here’s a question for all of us: Have you paid closer attention to the man with the unclean spirits? Did you notice that Mark says nothing about the man just coming off the street (i.e. outsider)? We don’t know how long this man has lived with these unclean spirits. We don’t know if he, like others Jesus healed, had lived with this his whole life. We don’t know his social status. We don’t know how

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<sup>1</sup> Boring, 63

much money this man had. All we know is that he was in the synagogue and, after the people stand amazed at Jesus' authority, this man screams.

Today's verses really got me thinking the whole insider vs outsider thing. Unfortunately, this could be used in harmful ways saying that the outsiders are always filled with evil spirits and before they can join us, they must be cleansed. Or this could be used in anti-semitic ways. For example, distorting Mark 1:22 always making the religious officials the bad guys, even though our Savior was a Rabbi! So, I want to acknowledge how harmful this passage could be if not handled with care.

But, I can't get my mind off of this man with the unclean spirits. Could this passage help us to examine our hearts and lives in order for us to *change* our hearts and lives so we can trust the Good News? In our churches today on January 31, 2021, many of us who claim Christ as Savior of the world are dealing with evil spirits. We are dealing with the evil spirits of anxiety, scarcity, the need for control, fear, hopelessness, and complacency. These spirits are loud and they surface in many different ways. For our friend in Mark 1, it surfaced in a particular way and Jesus took control of the situation because he is the Son of God. Today, these unclean spirits surface in unhealthy ways that lead to broken relationships in our congregations and broken relationships with congregations and their wider communities. For example, I think of the recurring theme of congregations who stayed the same over the decades while ignoring the opportunities in their community that was changing only to close because the congregation was plagued by

the unclean spirit of complacency to keep doing the same thing and expecting different results. Or I think of the congregations that fall prey to the unclean spirit of scarcity when times get tough.

In more horrible terms, I think of churches that have fallen to the evil spirit of bigotry and hate in order to wield power and influence in their own governments. For example, I think of the “German Christians” in Nazi Germany. Once Adolf Hitler came to power as the Reich Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, these so-called Christians were consumed by the unclean spirits of power, hate, and racial purity. They were so consumed that they viewed anyone who didn’t support the Nazis as unpatriotic or even traitors. The Nazis had tightened their grip on this distorted and twisted organism that was just as distorted and twisted as the cross



that would hang across the Third Reich, including many “churches”:  
The swastika. And swastikas still plague us today.

Yet, there were people who followed the courage of Jesus in Mark 1 to speak to these evil spirits a little over a year later in the form of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which is included in the *Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Part 1*. Many church leaders who opposed Hitler were involved in the creation of this document, including Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

In the heart of the declaration, there are six theses. Each thesis is scripture and is followed by a rejection of the false doctrine that was

being preached behind the Nazi pulpits. That is to say: “The ‘yes’ of the gospel...always entails a necessary ‘no’.”<sup>2</sup>

In point two of the declaration, it quotes 1 Corinthians 1:30:

*Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

In this portion of the Barmen Declaration, it loudly and defiantly proclaims no one and nothing else, other than Jesus Christ, can lay a claim on our lives. “Through [Christ] befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, explicit rejection of the heresy preached in Reich Churches is declared:

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<sup>2</sup> *Book of Confessions: Study Edition Revised*, WJK Press: Louisville, 2017, p.346.

<sup>3</sup> The Theological Declaration of Barmen 8.14.

*We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.<sup>4</sup>*

Drawing on the strength of the Holy Spirit and following the model of Jesus' ministry in Mark 1, the people who created and supported the Theological Declaration of Barmen spoke to the evil spirits. Instead of backing off because of fear, they confronted the unclean spirits and said "Silence!".

Unfortunately, many people who wrote and supported this document were martyred, including Bonhoeffer. Niemöller, one of the chief architects of this document, was a personal prisoner of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8.15.

Hitler. Yet, like the spirits Jesus drove out of the man in the synagogue that day, the spirits confronted nearly 90 years ago are defeated spirits. Through the Holy Spirit's power and grounded in the love of God our Creator, we follow the example of our Savior.

Today's verses point to the Living Word, Jesus Christ, who has absolute authority and claim over every area of our lives. It is in Christ and only in Christ can we place our trust to save us from the unclean spirits that surface in subtle and explicit ways that tempt us to place our trust in ourselves. But, as we have read together today, the Savior of Humanity, the Son of God, the One who preached for us to change our hearts and lives and to trust in the Good News of God's coming kingdom is the same one who stares down the forces of evil and commands them to be silent. The same Savior who healed the man in the synagogue that day is the same

Savior who lays his claim upon our lives even while we think it is hopeless.

Ultimately, it's never hopeless, though it may seem terrifying. Our hope and our trust rests in Jesus Christ. In no one else can we find peace against the already defeated evil forces that seek to harm us.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.