



Lent reflection for February 21, 2024

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A reading from Mark 1:29-45

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

A man with a skin disease came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I am willing. Be made clean!" Immediately the skin disease left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly but stayed out in the country, and people came to him from every quarter.

Today's Reflection is by Asa Swain

This reading reminds me of Jesus's power of healing. When I read this story I am struck by how amazed people were to be healed by Jesus and how quickly the news spread, as people far and wide came to be healed. If Jesus appeared in New York today, how many of us would stop what we are doing and rush to him in the hope of being healed?

I'm very lucky to be in pretty good health, but I know I often take it for granted. My father has been suffering for the last three months from a skin disease, a mysterious allergic reaction. He's been taking a lot of medication and I'm glad he's finally getting better. He's getting older, so this mysterious illness scared me, and I'm really grateful he is recovering. I know dealing with a chronic illness is hard, it makes it difficult to get through your day. But on the other hand, this scripture reminds me of the relief and the delight we feel when we do finally recover from an illness. The joy the man with the skin disease felt still echoes from this reading, and I can understand why he wanted to share that joy with everyone else.

It's easy to read bible passages and be astonished by how long ago this was, and how strange these stories feel. Do we still believe people are possessed by literal demons? Probably not. But as people reminded Elmo recently on Twitter, many of us are not okay. When I think of the mental health issues that people are struggling with today, like depression, addiction, and despair, I feel like the demons are still here among us. I admit my mental health isn't perfect. I worry too much about things I can't control, I obsess about money, I get distracted by my phone, I worry about where I will be ten or twenty years in the future, and forget to live in the moment. I walk to the subway each morning reading depressing news articles instead of taking a moment to admire the beautiful morning that God has given us.

If we have an angel and a demon sitting on our shoulders, I think I tend to listen to the demon all too often. It's so easy to give into temptation. Listening to our personal demons gives us an easy way out, an excuse to procrastinate, to ignore the evils we see happening nearby. They distract us from God, and steal our time, our money, and our passion. I know nobody's perfect, but I yearn to do better, to be more present, more empathetic, more joyful.

Everyone knows that being sick is no fun, but I think the demons people struggle with are more dangerous. Thousands of years ago Jesus traveled around Galilee healing people and freeing them from their demons. I hope during this Lenten season I can spend more time listening to God's loving words, and with his help, free myself from the demons I struggle with, and share in the same delight that these early followers of Jesus felt.



Asa Swain was raised in the Episcopal Church in Newton, Massachusetts, and moved to New York City ten years ago. He lives in Prospect Park South with his wife Alea, and has been attending Holy Apostles since 2018. He is also a member of St. Lydia's, a Lutheran dinner church in Gowanus.