

Sermon: Resisting Evil

Mark 1:21-28

“On Behalf of the whole church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sins?”

“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”

Just who was this man that showed up in the synagogue that day? He was burdened with an unclean spirit, he was loud, and interrupting the normal daily process of the synagogue. If we change our perspective, we can see him in our context: meaning if a homeless, dirty, loud, interruptive person entered our Sunday service, it would get our attention.

What is interesting is that this man did not affect the people in the synagogue that day. No, they were more focused on Jesus because he was astounding them with his presence and his teachings. This was because what Jesus was giving them was so different than any of the things they had been taught before. His words were penetrating their minds and hearts. His words were affecting their hearts and souls. Even the man with the unclean spirit was distracted from his personal goals because he was shocked and intrigued with Jesus. The unclean spirit knew it was in

the presence of God and inquires of Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?”

In studying the exorcism accounts in the gospel of Mark we find that in each case the demons or evil knew they were in the presence of the “Son of the Most High God.” They knew the identity of Jesus and that he had authority over them. And, they were afraid of being displaced from the possessed human.

As Jesus taught in the synagogue, his authority was present there and it intrigued the minds and hearts of the people. This includes the man with the unclean spirit as he almost immediately shows up. The presence of Jesus, the man with the purest and cleanest spirit, draws out the presence of the unclean spirit. Jesus’ authority and teachings reveal the truth about those listeners to themselves that day. The reality is that this is what happens as Jesus works in all our hearts. Our spiritual eyes are awakened and we can see the evil of this world, even in ourselves.

The man with the unclean spirit is really meant to be an image of the lives of those in the synagogue that day. His dirty and filthy presence is not about personal hygiene, immorality, being bad, or Judaism. Rather, his presence “in the synagogue” is descriptive of the diseased state of the souls of all those present, their fragmented lives, and the evil that resided in them. When they looked at the

unclean man they were looking in a mirror to who they were, and they all were astounded at the contrast between themselves and the one with true authority, Jesus.

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” His words show us that evil always understands the distance between itself and Jesus. Also, remember that he not only speaks for himself but for all present that day. He is speaking for all people that have experienced the torment of evil in their lives; he is the spokesman for all who are broken by the effects of evil. He represents the fragility of the human condition; that we are susceptible to sin and evil. The possessed man knows the answer to his own question. He longs for and recognizes the promise of what Jesus was teaching; that good always conquers evil. He knew Jesus’ response would be “Everything, I have everything to do with you.” And let us know that Jesus’ answers are for us also, that he has everything to do with us as we fight and resist the evils of this world.

In this world, we often see a hard line between “demons” and ourselves: that evil is just a condition of the broken soul. Evil does exist in this world as entities that seek to conquer our souls and remove us from God’s presence eternally. However, evil is also a state of sin, a state that we are constantly fighting against when we see and recognize it in our lives and the world around us.

Regardless of your thoughts on the personification of demons, or evil, it is hard to deny that we are surrounded by evil forces in our world. Evil seeks to destroy families, to destroy faith and the church. Evil seeks to separate us from God and many times it uses the frailty of humanity to accomplish its mission. Evil attracts the minds of many, evil provides drugs and harmful substances to people that cause them to be addicted and destroy their lives. Evil exists in the dark recesses of some minds that causes racism, prejudice, and greed. While these are true we must also be mindful of the reality of evil. The word gets thrown around quite a bit, especially in relation to politicians and policies. I think this is probably not as common as we may think. Rather, evil is a dark spiritual force in this world that uses the minds and actions of humans to do its bidding. It is much more than corrupt politicians and self-consumed corrupt people, or self-serving public policies that only profit a few. It is much more than countries that have policies that seek to destroy other countries. It is a powerful force in its own right that seeks nothing less than the destruction of God himself and anyone that dares to proclaim Jesus as savior. However, evil in itself has no real power unless humans fall prey to and act to its invitations.

In other words, we Christians have a vital role to play in the fight against evil. I opened this sermon with the words of the vows we all have taken.

“On Behalf of the whole church I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sins?”

“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”

We all have answered yes to these questions. If we are to fulfill those vows, to really live into them, it requires us to remain aware, to be vigilant, against the evil in this world. It requires that we not allow our lives to exist in a false state of security, one based in complacency, one lived in spiritual blindness.

It means that whenever we see or experience evil in the world, we pray about it. Many times, that is all we can do, but let's be aware that prayer is powerful. We pray for the release of those suffering by the results of evil, those addicted, imprisoned, those living in poverty and those under subjugation to policies that oppress, to all those fighting injustices. But most importantly we pray for the defeat of evil itself.

So, for those of us this morning who are living in relative safety and security, those of us that live in comfort, we can rejoice in the blessings that God has given us. There is no shame in that. But we do not live in a vacuum, and as Karl Barth stated, “We are to read the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.” I guess for us, it is the Bible in one hand and cell phone in the other. Let this be our stand. To stay informed, to be objective to the events and happenings of

this world weighted against the truth of the scriptures and not our personal opinions; that we will be vigilant in prayer and action against the evils we see and encounter in this world, even when it is uncomfortable. Then my friends we will be fulfilling our vows to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression, in whatever forms they present themselves.”

If you are one experiencing evil this morning, you know the fear and anguish that it creates. However, know this: God wins, God always wins and evil will be defeated! Yes, evil may persist for a season, but God wins, God always wins! God will not abide “evil, injustice, and oppression, in whatever forms they present themselves” to persist forever. So be vigilant in service, and be vigilant prayer until that day.

Our fights against evil are not always big events that change our position, our country, or the world in one sweeping movement. Rather, it is the consistent keeping of our vows that makes a difference in winning over evil.

Paraphrasing Robert F. Kennedy: “we are to be ripples of hope, for all those daring ripples come together in a wave to sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression” and that, my friends, is how God works in our lives to save this world.

So, I call to you to continue those works in God’s name that fight against the effects of evil in this world: So, keep-----

- Delivering those meals on wheels
- Keeping supporting the mission of God in local churches
- Keep praying
- Keep studying God's Word
- Keep visiting those who are homebound
- Keep volunteering for your church
- Keep serving in church leadership
- Keep having a voice in local and national politics.
- Keep showing the love and truth of Christ to all you meet outside the walls of this church.
- In all you do, keep resisting evil and its effects in any form that you encounter it in this world.

These are small efforts in respect to the needs of this country and this world, but we settle our faith in a God that magnifies those daring ripples into powerful waves that can topple the mightiest walls of “evil, injustice, oppression.”

Let us be mindful as we live out our lives as Christ servant's realizing the evil that exists in this world.

Let us be mindful of evil, but not afraid of it as God wins, God always wins.

Amen