

Text: Mark 1: 21-28  
Theme: "With Authority"  
#942

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Epiphany 4B  
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When starting a new job or career often the best thing to get ourselves acclimated is to jump right in and get busy. That's just what happened to the disciples in our Gospel today. Just a week ago Jesus was reaching out to some Galilean fishermen to join up with Him. He would make them fishers of people, He told them. So they left their careers and families behind to team up with Jesus—whom they hardly knew. They had initially recognized Jesus the Son of God in John's Gospel, but Mark says nothing about what these new followers thought. They simply left **everything familiar** to them and followed Jesus.

So Jesus led them to Capernaum, on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. It was the Sabbath, and they went to worship in the local Synagogue. As a visiting rabbi, or teacher, Jesus was asked to read Scripture and expound on it. So He began teaching, but with an authority that the folks in Capernaum had never heard before.

What happened next is pretty incredible and caught the worshippers completely off guard. A man who had an unclean spirit stood up and began shouting at Jesus. The unclean spirits inside the man blurted out,

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

The unclean spirit possessing the man attempted to gain authority or control over Jesus by blurting out Jesus’ name and identity. Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to leave the man, and after a whole lot of noise and wretching around the man was freed of the spirit who had been controlling him.

Can you imagine this scene?? Here the disciples had just started up with Jesus, and the people of Capernaum had just met Him, and Jesus is called out—identified—by an unclean spirit! And then, Jesus exorcises the demon from the man! There must have been a bit of fear associated with the compliments Jesus received.

“What is this?” they asked. They must have been looking at one another basically dumbstruck with amazement. “Who is this person in our midst?” “How did He get here?” “Can He be the One for whom we have been waiting?” And...the disciples must have been beside themselves wondering what in the world they have gotten themselves into!

The folks in the synagogue, however, were pretty impressed with Jesus. They were amazed at the authority with which Jesus acted and spoke. Even the unclean spirits obey him!

Just a short while into this time spent with Jesus and the first thing these new disciples were seeing was their first miracle—exorcising an unclean spirit. Jesus begins His ministry by jumping in headlong with the disciples. And the unclean spirits were the first to proclaim who Jesus is: The Holy One of God!

Right at the beginning of the Gospel Jesus is revealed as a powerful force for good. We also see that as this powerful force, Jesus throws Himself right into the midst of humanity's problems and messes. He gets down and dirty with unclean spirits who are trying to gain power over Him!

I look at this Gospel as showing us that Jesus does not shy away from the problems we as humans face. He gets right into the mix and, as a powerful force for good, Jesus brings healing, hope, and New Life as He gives that man his life back. To be controlled by an unclean spirit meant that the man was ostracized from much of society—or at least he would be the worse his condition became.

We are faced with the effects of our broken and sinful world every day. Drug abuse and crime have increased. The sexual abuse scandals that are rocking our Olympic gymnastics team, the school shootings like the one in rural Kentucky, the crime and the murders in our cities is frightening. Across the oceans we hear of genocide atrocities in Syria and Africa.

It can be easy to become overwhelmed by all the unclean spirits working in the world around us today. We can become negative, pessimistic, even paranoid. Out here in the country we see less of these horrific events, but the brokenness is still evident. There is still bullying being done on and by our youth as well as on and by adults. There are injustices and tensions between people and races that seem to crop up regularly. There are dangers present in the electronic world that we couldn't have envisioned just 20 years ago. Identity theft is real. Phone scams are trying to pry our money from us.

We see the effects of a broken world in nature as wild fires raged through the dry Southwestern US. Now as the rains come, mudslides are happening. We have had earthquakes and volcanic eruptions recently.

Jesus didn't promise those who followed Him easy lives. Certainly Jesus knew the struggles He faced as He began His ministry. Now these green-behind-the-ears disciples are inserted into the midst of the evil and brokenness Jesus faced. But they are firsthand witnesses to the power and authority that God has unleashed on the world in Jesus!

Jesus didn't eradicate the sin and brokenness of the world we live in. That can be troubling when we stop to think about it. But Jesus did come to bring hope and healing to our world. He came to show us of God's deep

and abiding love for humans and of God's desire that we find our salvation in Jesus. He came to save us from our sin and forgive us.

Jesus showed in the healing today that He will not stand by as evil overtakes us. Jesus has come to bring life, healing and hope as we face the evils around us. He came to show us a way out—the way of love and sacrifice. He came to bring forgiveness for the sins that we, His people, commit day after day. He promised to get down into the dirt and grime of life to reach out to all. He walks with us on our journey through life. He rejoices with us when things go well for us, He cries with us when we are hurting and broken. He carries us when our burdens and the problems of life get too much for us to bear.

Jesus brought healing and a whole new lease on life for the man whose unclean spirits Jesus exorcised. Jesus has not left us or our world to fall into the hands of the Evil One. Evil still is present in our world as we know it today. But we have the promise of Jesus our Lord that one day all the darkness and evil will forever be banished and we will live in the Kingdom of God as it was meant to be.

Until that time we find our hope in Christ and we go about our lives being the people of Christ in this world to bring the love of Christ to bear in a world that needs Him so much. AMEN