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Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, B, February 1, 2015 A.D.

Mark 1:21-28 21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried 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." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "**Be silent, and come out of him!**" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. (NRSV)

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

May grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen. (2 John 3)

When the movie "The Exorcist" first came out it was a phenomenon. People were talking about it--pieces of it were shown on TV, etc. I personally never saw the movie, but I think I kinda got the drift--it was about exorcising a demon from a young girl. What do you believe--do demons still come to live in humans?

In our Gospel today Jesus encountered in a synagogue--in church of all places--a man who was possessed, "a man with an unclean spirit." The Greek word for 'unclean spirit' is 'δίαβολος,' translated 'demon or devil,' and it means literally, 'destroyer.' Do you know anyone whose life was destroyed under possession by an unclean spirit? Meaning that their life was wrapped around unclean thoughts--unclean activities? Being possessed is about ownership, so

Part I Concerns Alien Ownership.

The first thing I notice here is that the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it was **with authority**.

Recall what the relationship is between Christmass and Epiphany:

- The Nativity of Christ shows that Jesus was born as **totally human**.
- The Epiphany season shows that the man, Christ Jesus, is **totally God**.

Those astounded people were seeing God's authority manifested here.

The second thing I notice is that even though, "...he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes," the people were merely amazed at our Lord's authoritative teachings but didn't move to place themselves under that authority! They were "ooh-ing and ahh-ing" but their hearts were still under alien management. Alien management: Mark's diagnosis for all of us whom Christ is still seeking today. Our deepest need is an ownership transfer to be freed from evil, alien management. We are always needing to be brought back under God's gracious rule.

Now recall that it was in church where Jesus encountered the man possessed. You may remember back 15-20 yrs. the "**BTK**" murderer, Dennis Rader, in Wichita, Ks. **BTK = Bind, Torture, Kill--and the killer was a member of an ELCA Lutheran church!** Let's face it--although it is not an easy topic in today's unbelieving world, the power of the demonic can strike in the very house of God.

Unless a power stronger than that of the **δίαβολος** arrives to manage our lives, we face the risk of final destruction like that Lutheran killer.

Here's a story about a stronger power:

A great old California church in Orange county called a new pastor, and after about a year, rumors started circulating that the old gothic building, similar to a beautiful European church and seating close to 1000, was going to be torn down, and a new "big box" church was to be built in its place. But a 75 year old member whose name is Helen would not let it happen. She came here to Sacramento and started the process to put that church building on the National Register of Historic Places. She didn't tell the pastor or the leadership for fear she would be stopped, but she made sure that when the documents about the process began to come out, copies were sent to the church office. In a short time the process was completed because it was fast-tracked in Sac'to. They were considered an ethnic group--no buildings of German ancestry were on the Historic roster. Well, the pastor was livid when he found out that the deed was done and the church was saved. He said some very nasty things to Helen and her husband Elmer, but the pastor just hadn't opened his mail from the State of California.

That building faced destruction by the wrecking ball, but it was saved by a power stronger than the Pastor and the Church Council.

Did Helen do the right thing? I'm not sure. But it does illustrate that it takes a greater power to save the doomed from destruction.

So, summing up, simply being amazed at what God has done doesn't rescue us from alien ownership--we need to move to new ownership or face destruction.

II. The Good News Is That Our Lord Christ Renews His Ownership of His Own.

First, He Renews His Ownership By His Authority Over Evil Spirits.

24"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!"

25"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. **"Come out of him!"** 26The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. (NIV)

Authority means power.

In Greek 'authority' denotes, "ability to perform an action" , "permission or freedom granted by the King", "Christ's divinely given power to act." (G. Kittel on εξουσια)

So Jesus addressed the demon, and that evil spirit came out of the possessed man violently and with a shriek.

That is known in our day as an exorcism.

There's a new book about the Malagasy Lutheran Church by the Rev. Dr. Robert Bennett, which tells of the spiritual warfare in that island off the east coast of Africa. Evil spirits have been discerned in congregations there, and exorcisms have been successfully carried out in Lutheran churches!

Btw, my computer died last Wednesday with the beginnings of this sermon in it. I called my Lutheran friend at the Apple Core, and he said bring it in--I'll fix you up. Well he transferred my last backup of the hard drive to another computer and sent me home with an older Apple, so I'm temporarily back to semi-normal.

Well, he always likes to talk theology and I told him about my 'demon sermon' today. Would you like to know what he told me? He and another Christian did a prayer of exorcism over a friend of theirs with the laying on of hands, and the man's life has been remarkably changed--two Christian laymen!

Has Christ's power really been given to the church of today?

Q.: Who taught us to pray, "But deliver us from evil"? Of course, our Savior Christ. But the better translation of that petition is, 'Deliver us from the Evil One.'

The power of evil resides in the person of the Devil and his evil spirits.

Some New Testament interpreters say that what our Lord dealt with in His day as 'demon possession' is what we today call mental illness. Rightly understood, there might be truth in that interpretation. When I was a Pastoral Psychologist I regularly charted diagnoses of the various states of alcoholism and drug addictions, as well as the underlying pathologies, according to the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Assn. Ask a recovering alcoholic, e.g., who is a Christian whether he or she has been set free from the Evil One, from an evil spirit. They have been rescued--and so have we--by the power and authority of Christ.

In the Second Place, Jesus Renews His Ownership By Another Kind of Power.

Mark 10: 44 **"...whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** (NIV) He was the Suffering Servant who gave up his life on the cross--indeed the payment of a ransom.

By that ransom we are set free from the Evil One when we put our trust in God's offer. That offer is that Our Heavenly Father will make what Luther called, das fröhliche Wechsel, the happy exchange--our sin for His righteousness.

We have accepted His offer--He now owns our sin--we own His redemption.

We are now living under new management, new Ownership, paid for by His blood.

For us the ownership transfer was made at our Baptism--"we were washed , we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor.6:11) --but remember, in his Small Catechism, Martin Luther admonishes us to renew daily that ownership.

Upon arising we are to say the name of the Holy Trinity as we make the sign of the cross in remembrance of the power of our Baptism.

Renewing that ownership happens in confession and absolution; it can be wrenching-- such repentance means turn around and do right.

Such repenting and believing the good news of the cross, as we heard Mark quote Jesus last Sunday, makes us ready to serve our neighbor.

Final Point, **"Follow me,"** is Jesus' Word for daily living.

Staying in that Word through faithful worship and reading our Bibles at home will keep us close to our Lord and ready to give of ourselves.

Over at Advent Lutheran there's a group of 50+ reading the Bible all the way through in three months--they meet regularly to share their insights.

I wonder how that is changing their hearts for service to their neighbors.

Might that be an example for each of us to follow?

We **are** under new management, you know.

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