
[21] And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. [22] And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. [23] And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, [24] "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 out with a loud voice, came out of him. [27] And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." [28] And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. (ESV)

"The Dirty Side of Ministry"

In his words concerning the deaths of the many members of the Armed Forces during his time as president, President Bush said of the fallen heroes, "These women and men knew the dangers, and they faced them willingly, knowing they had a high and noble purpose in life."

When we consider our call to take up the cross and follow Jesus, we too should be aware of its dangerous dynamics and still do it willingly. Our ministry will not always be one of glory, celebration, and success. We will be afflicted in every way but

not driven to despair. We will be persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed. This ministry we have is like a two-edged sword: one that heals as well as one that destroys; one that cuts downs as well as one that builds up. And often when we commit ourselves to taking responsibility for telling others about Christ, we forget about the dark side of our ministry-the dirty side of ministry. We forget that in this ministry we not only have to deal with the good, but also with the bad, and the ugly. It's a dirty job but someone still has to do it.

This ministry modeled after Jesus' preaching, teaching, and prophesying also has to confront the ugliness of its opposition. Strangely, the ugliness is not always found outside of our four walls, but it's found within our midst. The ugliness, the darkness, is often discovered in ourselves. One does not have to search the far corners of the world to encounter evil; but the message of today's text is that evil and spiritual terrorism can be found in our very midst. "And immediately there was in their synagogue a

man with an unclean spirit." There is a spiritual war going on that exists to hinder the work of God. There are spiritual terrorists that come to church to undermine its mission and ministry. We have our own "Osama Bin Ladens" working to divide the kingdom. We have our own spiritual terrorists destroying God's ministry. Who are they? We have our 'O-some-have Bin Sleeping'; 'O-some-have Bin Arguing'; 'O-some-have Bin Fighting'; 'O-some-have Bin Complaining'; and 'O-some-have Bin Missing.' Humorous and cute as that sounds those spiritual terrorists are doing more damage to our ministry than the drug addict, the prostitute, and the pimp simply because those spiritual terrorists lurk in our hearts. And in every church, there sit saints bound by spiritual forces -saints going to hell and saints that love to raise hell. Well, what are you talking about pastor? Let's look at the text, here is a man possessed with an unclean spirit (more actually "in an unclean spirit). Here is a man who knew who Jesus was. He practiced his religion coming to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He heard the

word preached by Jesus. He knew the right things to say, calling Jesus the Holy One of God. Yet, he was found with an unclean spirit. You see everybody talking about heaven ain't going there. Just because you say you believe in God doesn't mean he is the head of your life -even the demons believe in God and shudder. And we often think that just because people say that they know Jesus and have a relationship with God, that everything in them is good. We feel that just because they may serve on boards, committees sing in the choir, work on staff and have been faithful to the church for years that they are in good standing with God. We like to call them good members because they seem to be helping our church in a good way. But even Jesus proclaimed of himself, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." And I declare to you this morning that just because you may look good, smell good, act good, and talk well does not mean you are good and doing well. It does not mean that you are clean on the inside and free from evil. But Jesus taught us to pray,

"Deliver us from evil" because we do have some evil ways. If many of us were honest we will acknowledge that we have some unclean spirits about us-some evil, wicked ways. We have some habits that we just can't kick. Some lifestyles we just can't get away; some compulsive natures that we can't control. And the original reason we have come to the house of God, the real reason we have come to the foot of the cross was to get answers and deliverance. And since we've been here, all that the church has given us has been to show us some apathy or maybe some sympathy, some tolerance, acceptance, and understanding; yet what we need is deliverance. (Say we need deliverance). And so, we pray, Lord deliver us from evil. Deliver us from our impulse to lie and our fear to confess the truth. Deliver us from the spirit of robbery-our desire to steal whether it be money, office supplies, or company time. Lord, deliver us from our murderous natures- our abilities to assassinate each other's character with ridicule, criticism, and scandal. Lord, deliver us from this evil- the

desire to always do things our ways and go by our feelings and what we think rather than walking by faith and your Word. Lord, deliver us from this evil coming to church when we feel like it and when we do come, bringing our own agendas and plans. Deliver us from evil, Lord - our proneness to worry, our anxiety to always be in control, our refusal to worship, our excuses for and reasons for keeping our arms folded, lips tight, and legs crossed when we should be up giving you praise and glorifying your name. Lord, deliver us. Deliver us, Jesus.

And so, the question for this day is from whence does our delivery come? We, who are supposed to have this ministry yet find ourselves in need of ministry- how can we be delivered, so that we can deliver others? Lord, how can we help others if we are too impotent to help ourselves?

I. With immediacy rather than hesitation...

First we must learn to respond to God's word with immediacy. (Say immediacy). The first thing we learn about Jesus

and his effect on his community is that they all responded with immediacy. Throughout the opening chapters, Mark consistently states that phrase, "And immediately." And immediately, he saw the heavens opened and the spirit descending upon him like a dove. And immediately, the spirit drove him into the wilderness. And immediately, Simon and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus. And immediately, he called James and John and they left their father in the boat. And immediately, the paralytic rose up and took up his mat and went out. And immediately, after she touched the hem of his garment her twelve years of hemorrhaging ceased and she was healed. Throughout Mark's Gospel, there is an immediate response to God's voice - to his Word. And the Greek word used here for 'immediate' is the word, "euthus" meaning "without wavering and straightway." It means more than without hesitation but it implies a person is who charging to his goal with an urgency and filled with excitement. Jesus approached his ministry as though he was charging forward

to his goal. People responded to his word, as though they were running across the finish line winning a race. And that's how we have to approach this ministry. We have to respond to it as if we were crossing the finish line. When it comes to reaching the lost - we have to respond immediately- we have to respond right now and not later. There's no time to call a town meeting, no time to think it over or pray over it. No time to do a cost analysis or take an opinion poll. But we have to do it right now. Right now! Right now! We have to heal the sick right now. We have to raise the dead right now. We have to cast out the demonic-right now. Tell someone right now....

II. Direct contact rather than indirect affiliation...

To have this ministry means to have direct contact with that which seems unclean. Ministry cannot be done from a distance. But rather ministry has to be done up close and personal. Tell someone (you have to get up close and personal). That's means we have to take a personal look at those around us

and ourselves. Look at the text. The word Mark uses here for 'unclean' implies a "desire to be filthy". To be unclean means to have a desire for filth over that which is holy. Any time we choose to do the wrong thing rather than choose that which is right we desire filth. Any time we choose to "set someone straight, tell them off, or give them a piece of our mind" rather than forgive and move on-we are choosing filth. When we choose to fudge our taxes or not to trust God's word and tithe, we are choosing filth. And in order to handle this ministry we must be willing to identify the filth and deal with it. And that may go against your sensibilities and your sense of political correctness and tolerance - but in order to get delivered and to deliver others you must be willing to get your hands a little dirty. And the reality of the Gospel is this: "The unclean are not the sinners. The sinner is the one who does not embrace and wash the unclean." And in Jesus' time, that concept went against the standard Jewish belief because the Jews were taught to avoid

that which was unclean at all cost. They would avoid people with leprosy who cried out "unclean, unclean" because they were deemed unclean. They would avoid women who were experiencing their monthly cycles because they were deemed unclean. They would not touch animals and food that according to Mosaic Law was unclean. They would not touch the bodies of the dead because they were unclean. Associating with non-Jews was unclean. Yet, even though they sought to avoid the unclean, they, themselves were often found unclean. Here in their midst is one of their own-worshipping, serving, dressing right, and talking right and still was unclean. But the good news is that although the people tried to avoid the unclean- Jesus sought them out. The good news is that we serve a Jesus who likes to get up close and personal and have direct contact with those people and places that seem unclean. Jesus sought to make the filthy fit for the kingdom. He sought to make the dirty a declaration of God's love and kindness. Jesus was God's detergent for a dirty humanity. He

reached into the places that other agents could not and would not go. He would reach people that the prophets couldn't get to, the priests couldn't get to, and the kings couldn't get to. And that is what he is calling the church today to do. We are to be the cleansing agents for a filthy world. He wants us to reach those who others will not touch because the world has deemed them unclean.

Conclusion: We are called by God to be Change Agents through the Spirit.

God has called us to this time and place to be change agents in the world. We are set aside by the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to do all that is in our power to tell others that they are saved by grace through faith. We are able to withstand the forces of evil because "He who is within you is greater than he who is in the world."

Jesus has driven out your "unclean spirits" through the waters of Baptism and continues to sustain you through Word and

Sacrament to be His "change agents" in the world. He gives you His Holy Spirit to empower you to speak and act even when you think it is impossible to do so. Jesus is the One who is with you always and will never leave you nor forsake you.

It is time to be involved in the "Dirty Side of Ministry!" To seek the lost, to proclaim the forgiveness of Christ, to reach out to those who are considered, "Unclean."

So, go forth in the name and power of Jesus Christ, be a leavening in the world, a healer, a cleanser, a "change agent" for the kingdom of heaven. Amen.