

Authority
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Mark 1.21-28
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Mark does not waste time. Mark has a point to make and jumps right into Jesus' life and ministry. We're still in the very first chapter, verse 21, and already Mark has Jesus as a grown man, baptized by John, blessed by the heavens ripping open and a word of belovedness, cast out into the wilderness, emerging to call disciples, and now his ministry begins. *Immediately* is important to Mark. Let's do this *right now* because Jesus' power and influence and world-changing actions cannot wait.

Jesus has a purpose, a blessing, and a team. It is time for his first act of ministry in the world. Will it be a rousing sermon on a mountainside? Will he turn water into wine? Jesus walks into the temple to teach and is immediately faced with conflict.

He is an amazing teacher. People are talking to each other about him saying, *This guy is remarkable. The other rabbis don't teach like this. He is powerful. I can't believe what I just heard.* But there's this one guy near the back who shifted in his seat and rolled his eyes and couldn't stop himself from interrupting. Something came over him, it seems. Something beyond him and deep within him cried out, *What do you want with us, Jesus?*

Jesus looked right at him and saw everything. *An unclean spirit*, Mark calls it. A powerful darkness had overcome this man. The darkness knew that Jesus would destroy it. *What do you want with us?*

Jesus did not run. Jesus was not embarrassed. Jesus did not panic. Jesus looked deep into the man's eyes and said, *Be quiet.* And the heckling voice stopped. *Come out.* And the loud voice came out. There was no room for such darkness in the light of Jesus' presence.

Everyone watching knew something amazing and terrifying had just taken place in front of them. *Who is this? What just happened here?*

Yet I wonder what they were thinking to themselves. *Does he see me, too? What kind of power does he really have? What does he want with us?*

Mark will continue walking us through a series of crises and conflicts that mark the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus walks into these stories and

faces what is before him with a calming power. Out of each interaction comes birth, newness, liberation, abundance. Jesus speaks directly to the reality that is before him and separates truth from lies, good from evil, life from death with the power of his words. Like one who speaks and separates night from day, heavens from earth, land from sea. He orders chaos. He creates and re-creates in people's lives.

Stories of possession in the gospels make us nervous because they all involve Jesus staring straight into someone and seeing a reality others cannot see. He sees the truth. Nothing is hidden. In these stories the truth is that some dark force has taken hold of a person's life and completely transformed, ruined, or limited that life. And Jesus looks, sees, silences, releases those forces. He changes that life, frees that person, restores them to sound mind and full community.

This makes us nervous because they are scary, surreal stories. It makes us nervous because he might see us, too. We might be next. Even if we say that we want him to draw near, there is always a cost to being seen by him. You see, Jesus names the forces that do not belong in this world, even when they are forces we cling to mightily. *This does not serve you anymore*, Jesus says. *Release it*. Jesus brings a word that God is near, but the reality of what that means will cost us something. *What do you want with us*, we will ask.

I sure do like what you say, Jesus, and I sure am drawn to your presence. But all this stuff about loving your neighbor and loving yourself and turning your cheek and loving those who curse you and selling all the things you own and giving the money to the poor, all that stuff about losing yourself and becoming poor in spirit and taking up a cross to follow you...*What do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us?*

And Jesus speaks right to the fears and comforts and protective walls that surround the innermost parts of our beings, with the authority of one who sees right through it all, *Be silent. Come out*.

Fear and pretense and terror and carefully curated lives don't belong in the kingdom. *Be gone. You will not make your home here*, Jesus says.

As Karoline Lewis puts it: Jesus is a boundary breaker. "And Jesus reveals a boundary breaking God. We will see this all over Mark. Each and every boundary we try to put in place, we think is in place, even that which we perceive as impenetrable, God bursts through. Political, social, religious,

ethnic, racial, sexual, gendered, cosmic, even if we are honest, the final boundary we persist in thinking is beyond God's ability to shatter -- death."¹

We stare at boundary-breaking Jesus and ask: Who is this teacher? He has such authority that even the unclean spirits obey him. Even the unclean spirits obey him.

Let's be candid: we need this Jesus but we don't want this Jesus. We LOVE water-into-wine Jesus. An image of a God that celebrates, delights, saves the best for last; we are on board. We can even get on board with Sermon-on-the-Mount Jesus. Sure, he's a little preachy. All that salt of the earth and light of the world stuff, how serious can he really be about it? But the Jesus whose preaching and teaching and seeing and speaking transforms the way people live? The Jesus who looks at us and sees our beauty and our brokenness? The Jesus who speaks right to our shame and our culture comforts and calls them out of us? *What do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us?*

We need this boundary-breaking, truth-speaking Jesus to be real even if we often cannot believe him. How can God break into my life? this world? our city? How can we say God is here in our midst when there is such grief, such depression, such loneliness, such violence, such inequality? The gospel writer wants us to know that God is here. God is in present even in all that possesses us now: our inner darkness, the not-as-it-should-be world, our disbelief.

Jesus names what is broken, what needs to go, what no longer serves. He shines a light on what is limiting us from living fully. He challenges our addictions and habits and ways of moving in the world that are not compatible with the ways of God, and he calls them out of us. Jesus repeatedly faces these conflicts and walks right into them. He is not afraid. He knows that the real living is on the other side. The abundant life, the shalom life, the one that returns you to your fullest, best self, begins as he calls out the parts that need to go.

Our text this morning ends with a man freed to live and move fully in the world and a watching congregation staring in disbelief at all they have seen and heard. Then just four verses later, the whole city is at Jesus' door asking to be seen by him. They are lining up for Jesus to call out their stuckness, their weakness, their flawedness, their sickness, their crookedness. They

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3511>

quickly discover that the life on the other side is worth releasing the life that they know.

Every week we gather in this place to honor God, to spend time with each other, and to hear a word that we can carry back into our lives out there. But if we want to be a people who line up before Jesus and show our stuckness, weakness, flawedness, sickness, and crookedness, then we have to be intentional about that.

The congregation witnesses Jesus' power. Jesus faces the conflict with the unclean spirit and then offers a new reality to the entire town. They respond as a community to the life Jesus offers. This is how we respond, too.

Together.

Jesus works in our community by calling out the forces that limit and the possessions that restrict. We begin to let our guard down, tell the truth, admit a fear, confess a sin. We trust that the community can receive us as we truly are. We trust that when we cannot carry ourselves, the community can carry us; even in our flawedness and weakness.

We witness the power of what Christ can do in community, we talk about what we have seen and heard, then we go together to Jesus and ask to be made whole. We pray. We worship. We study. We pray some more. Our prayers take on a new shape and grow. We pray for each other. For our neighbors. For our enemies. We pray less for that thing that we really want and more for God's goodness to be known by our children and our friends and the stranger on the sidewalk. We say thank you. To God. To each other. We hug and we laugh more. We say I'm sorry. We forgive. We disagree about things that matter to our hearts, then we grab each other's hands in prayer and we keep holding on as we find our way through it. Because we have learned from Jesus that life is on the other side of conflict. It is not to be feared. We are less afraid. We are hopeful. We are living out the way of Jesus in the community of Jesus-followers.

What do you want with us Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? We discover he has destroyed what we do not need. He has destroyed what keeps us from each other and from God. He has destroyed what keeps us from life.

We take this work so seriously that we have a group of people in our congregation who are set aside and ordained for the purpose of walking these steps with us. This morning we commission the 2015 Diaconate. Each

deacon has already been ordained by this congregation, and today we remember that blessing and call out the best in them as an act of renewal.

Lynn, Ken, Judie, Ann, Clay, Jennifer, Linda, and Susan are committed to living into the way of Jesus with this faith community. They are giving themselves to the spiritual care of this place. They are committing themselves to your children, your wives, your husbands, your partners, to you. They are in prayer for you. They are available to walk with you through grief, questioning, crisis, conflict, celebration, and joy. They are committed to growing as a community of eight and expanding those holy friendships across this congregation. They give themselves to the way of Jesus that we might be a people who walk in his way more fully. Let us bless their work that Jesus might be at work amidst them and through them this year.