

## **Mark 1:21-28**

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 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.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 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.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

### **Sermon**

After Jesus called his disciples they go straight to work. Right here in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus begins to teach in the synagogue and share his message of God's good news. But, this message is not received with applause and amens. The people don't stand up and sing their praises in response.

Instead, a man with an unclean spirit stands up, right there in the sanctuary, saying, '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.'

Mark recognizes that a life of discipleship is not always comfortable or easy. It puts us in direct relationship with the unclean spirits of our world and does not let us ignore the brokenness of our world. Jesus responds to this man, and the unclean spirit within him, directly and passionately. He doesn't just look the other way and pretend like all is well or try to drown his struggles out with Alleluias, but he engages, and works to set this man free from the unclean spirit that has taken over his life.

For people of faith can not ignore the brokenness of our world and the unclean spirits that try to draw us away from our God and the life that God would have us live. Whether those be spirits of racism or poverty, addiction or illness, anger or depression, violence or lies.

We must pay attention to these things that seek to pull us away from God, but also remember, that we have no reason to fear them.

For Mark's gospel reminds us over and over again. That these unclean spirits do not have the authority over our lives. For it is only Jesus who has that authority. He teaches with authority, he speaks with authority, "he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" It is only Christ who has the right and the power to guide our lives.

For it is only Christ who can write the stories of our lives.

And Jesus does concern himself with those stories. The letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as "the author and the perfecter of our faith." Jesus is writing our stories with us. He is the author

of our faith, our discipleship, our very lives. And like any good author, Christ is the only one who has the authority to guide the lives of the characters in the stories He writes.

I watched a movie called “Stranger than Fiction” recently. One of the first scenes in the film shows the main character, Harold Crick, brushing his teeth, while the narrator describes his every move. Not so unusual for a movie, I suppose, until Harold begins to hear the words that the narrator speaks!

Harold is astounded and agitated by this revelation. He tries to get the voice to stop. He tries to understand it. He spends most of the rest of the movie trying to find where that narrator’s voice is coming from.

Eventually, he learns that he is hearing the voice, not just of the narrator, but of the author of the book that is being written about him. It is the voice of the author who is still writing the story of his life.

Along the way, Harold realizes that he is hearing the voice of the person who is in control of how his story ends up, and it seems more and more likely that the author is writing a tragedy, a story that will end with Harold’s death. So, he goes to confront her, to plead for his life. To ask that she might re-write his story.

Well, I can promise you, that the author of your story is not some writer of novels. Your story is no tragedy. No, this is a love story. It is the story of the love God has for you. And though the story may be full of obstacles and rivals and even unclean spirits - it will not end with death, but life eternal!

So, you need not argue with the author or try to change the ending of your story. You need not worry or fear that it won’t turn out as it should. For we know how your story will end. No matter what obstacles you face, no matter the struggles that stand in your path, you will end up in the hands of the God who loves you. Your story will end in the embrace of the author and perfecter of our faith. The one, and the only one, who has authority to guide your life and write your story.

For even the man who cried out in the sanctuary, interrupting Jesus’ sermon - he too finds salvation when Christ sends that unclean spirit out of him and sets him free.

So put your lives into the hands of the author and the perfecter of our faith. And trust that Christ is writing a beautiful story with your life.

Amen.