

The Exorcist Mark 1:21-28

Does this picture look familiar to you? It is from a particularly disturbing scene in the movie "The Exorcist". Loosely based upon some actual events, it is the story of a demon possessed teenaged girl and the efforts of two Catholic priests to remove it from her. I was 13 years old when the movie hit the theatres, and I remember it creating quite a stir at the time. Like the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*, everyone was talking about it. Movie critics called it a groundbreaking film, and it was. It was a Hollywood production filled with unspeakable violence, absolutely filthy profanity and horrific graphic images. It had everything the movie-going public wanted and then some, and it made old horror movies like *King Kong* or *the Blob* look like Saturday morning cartoons. As I prepared this week's message, I intended to make the actual clip part of our worship service but found it much too disturbing to watch.

Evil is real. Even though Hollywood and creators of some video games often glorify it, there can be no greater affliction than being influenced or controlled by it. It is a horrible thing and seeing its awful effects on others can bring fear and trembling into our own souls. The good news is that it need not be permanent. It is true that Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins, but we know from 1 John 3:8 that He also came to save us from evil. *The Exorcist* is not just a dreadful movie made in Hollywood but a fitting description of Jesus, the only One with power and authority over Satan and his minions.

Mark's gospel contains several accounts of Jesus healing those possessed by demons or unclean spirits, and it is no accident that one is found in the opening chapter. We begin this morning where we left off a few weeks ago. Driven from His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus began His earthly ministry to the cross and headed north towards the Sea of Galilee, where He found and called his first four disciples. Mark tells us that Simon, Andrew, James, and John immediately left their nets and followed Jesus to Capernaum, a town on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. Simon and Andrew made their home there, and Jesus spent the last years of His life there with His disciples, including the day He encountered a demon possessed man in the synagogue.

The synagogue is to Judaism like the church building is to Christianity. It is a place of worship, a place for teaching and learning and a place for gathering. It came as no surprise that Jesus immediately entered the synagogue to teach that day. It was the Sabbath, a day set aside to worship God and for rest and there was no other place He would rather be. What was surprising was how He taught. Verse 22 tells us those gathered there that day were astonished by His teaching. Reading between the lines we can infer that they were used to the same boring sermons every week and Jesus was like a breath of fresh air. In a way He was, for the Holy Spirit was upon Him like a dove. Mark tells us that Jesus taught as one with authority, and not as the scribes. That word authority means power, it means control and how ironic it is that Mark contrasts Jesus teaching with that of the scribes. The scribes were the professional religious leaders of the day, the ones that ran the show. They were the authorities of the day. Elsewhere in the Scriptures Jesus refers to them as hypocrites, whitewashed tombs, and blind guides. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and they were the bad, and even they were astonished. They were astonished, but they were not happy. There was a new authority in town. Jesus took them out of their comfort zone.

Then, right in the middle of the sermon, a great disturbance immediately broke out. We don't know whether the man causing the scene was a regular or someone who had wandered in off the streets. All we know is that he had an unclean or evil spirit. Today some might say he was possessed by a demon, much like the girl in the photo from the movie we looked at earlier. The demon owned him. If you are wondering where unclean spirits or demons came from, the answer is found in Revelation 12:7-12.

This fallen angel was literally out of control, screaming and shouting at the teacher. Look with me at verse 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. Do you wonder if the scribes were silently asking those same questions earlier? That is a subject for another Sunday. Today we will look at the ones the demon asked. What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Us means more than one, and on this occasion, he was a very vocal spokesperson for Satan's army of fallen angels. He recognized Jesus of Nazareth. That is a commonly used phrase to refer to Jesus today, but in those days it wasn't. It was meant as a slur, for it was often said that nothing good could come from Nazareth, a small hick town in the country.

What have you to do with us? The answer can be summed up in a single word: nothing. **The heavenly realm of Jesus and the demonic realm of Satan have nothing in common.** There are two kingdoms in this world God has temporarily placed us in. They are two completely different kingdoms, with two completely different rulers. They are like the north and south poles of our planet, diametrically opposed to each other. The heavenly kingdom, the kingdom of God, or shall we say the church is ruled by the Holy One of God, the Risen One, King Jesus, while the demonic kingdom, or shall we say the world, is ruled by the fallen one, the king of evil named Satan. The heavenly kingdom is refreshed by streams of living water, the worldly kingdom is as dry as old bones laying in a desert. The heavenly kingdom is a kingdom of life, light and divine truth, the demonic kingdom is one of death, darkness, error, and deceit. The heavenly kingdom is a kingdom of peace and joy, the worldly kingdom one of chaos, division, and fear. And on this day, those two kingdoms publicly collided in the most fitting of places, the synagogue.

The demon knew who he was up against. He not only recognized Jesus, he recognized Him as his enemy. The problem was he refused to recognize His authority. Have you come to destroy us? Rather than answer the question and be accused by the scribes of colluding with the evil one, Jesus rebuked him by saying be silent and come out of him. And he was and he did. **There are two kingdoms, but there is only one king with authority over both.** His name is Jesus, AKA the divine exorcist. Jesus spoke and the demon left. The bloody crucifix would come later.

Do you wonder where the unclean spirit went after he left the man? Did Jesus destroy him? Difficult questions, and we can find help in answering them by turning to the words of Jesus found in Mathews gospel 12:43-45. We heard the first part of this passage last week as we looked at Jonah and his ill-fated attempt to flee from God. Jesus' words were directed to the scribes. They wanted a sign from Jesus that He had authority. Jesus gave them one from the Scriptures. He told them Jonah was their sign and referring to himself he said a sign greater than Jonah was in their sight. They refused to believe Him.

The answer to our questions is that the unclean spirit came out of the man and lived to see another day. Is it possible that God's grace and a second chance are even extended to demons? The one thing more harmful to the truth than once saved always saved is once lost always lost. But instead of seeking light and living water, he travels through dark and waterless places and returns to his former residence. There he finds the door wide open and the place empty of any spiritual disciplines, allowing plenty of room for him and his cronies to move back in. Jesus is the divine exorcist that drives out demons. But unless we keep our eyes on His cross and fortify our house with some spiritual firewalls, unless we practice spiritual discipline and allow our mind, body, and soul to be filled with the truth of the Holy Scriptures, they will soon return with reinforcements.

Evil is real, but so is Jesus and the truth. They are absolutes. The problem we have today is that unclean spirits are much more attractive than we can imagine. If evil always looked like the demons in the movies everyone would fear it. Satan is the craftiest of deceivers and is constantly adapting as necessary to make the demons of lies and untruth appear attractive and lovely. That is a dangerous thing for a culture with so many living in beautiful and spacious homes that are empty, swept and put in order.

The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of hell will continue to collide. **The good news is that evil is no match for Jesus and the truth.** Today, the battlefield is not in the synagogue but in His church. The true church remains under attack, and the battle between truth and error will continue to intensify in the days to come. As we read earlier, Satan knows he only has a short time to do his work. He is working overtime, and we need to also. We have help, for Jesus will continue to expose and cast out those unclean spirits of error and deceit. He will destroy them when the time is right. Until that day comes, let us be watchful and wary that we don't invite them back in. Amen