



Sermon, Sunday February 4, 2024 “Jesus Drives Out an Unclean Spirit”

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:21-28 ²¹They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and 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.” ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!” ²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They 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.” ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Introduction: A Man Possessed by an Unclean Spirit

Today is the fifth Sunday after the Epiphany. Today’s text is the story of the early days of Jesus’ public life. In the early years of his public life, Jesus was mainly active in Capernaum, a fishing village north of the Sea of Galilee. According to verse 21 of today's text, when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the Capernaum synagogue and taught. Those who heard Jesus' teaching responded, **“They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”**

According to today's text, the reason the congregation was surprised by Jesus' teachings was because Jesus' teachings had authority, unlike the teachers of law.

In fact, the reactions of the people described in today's text are not typical. The teachers of law were experts in the law after all, while Jesus was just an ordinary carpenter. Today, if seminary professors and lay workers teach the Bible, whose teachings can we trust more? If we simply consider status or position without thinking about anything else, wouldn't most people trust the teachings of seminary professors more? However, today's text from the Gospel of Mark describes a special event, where the authority of Jesus' words is so outstanding that it is unrivaled.

According to the New Revised Standard Version (NRS), **‘there was a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit, and he cried out’.** (Mark 1:23).

But who is this person? There is no description of him in the biblical text. What is clear is that a person is possessed by an **“unclean spirit”** and must receive treatment. This man is unable to control his thoughts and actions.

There are many people today with similar symptoms. There are people around us who cannot control their emotions well, and there are also people who abuse themselves. Additionally, there are people around us who suffer from depression, bipolar disorder, and stress.

Furthermore, not only individuals but also entire societies can be caught up in an **“unclean spirit.”** These societies are unhealthy and have high rates of suicide and poverty. In this society, gun violence and human rights violations against unspecified people frequently occur.



If a society becomes sick, the ecosystem will also be damaged. The environmental destruction and climate crisis we are experiencing these days are evidence that our society is becoming sick.

Body: A new teaching and with authority

Let's go back to today's text. We do not know exactly what led people to say that this man was possessed by an unclean spirit. Anyway, in the eyes of people at the time, he was not a normal person. He says to Jesus in verse 24 of the text: **“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!”**. Then the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. (V.26)

So, what can we learn from the story of the healing of a man possessed by an **“unclean spirit”** described in today's Gospel of Mark? It tells us about our religious experience.

When I meet Christians who have had deep religious experiences while serving in ministry, they all say the same thing. It is confession about God that they came to know through their religious experience. Through deep religious experiences, we are shocked to shake the foundation of our faith. At the same time, we realize that God is not what we thought until now.

However, people do not want to think seriously about the fundamentals of faith because they are afraid of the shock that comes from experiencing such faith. Therefore, they are unable to live a life of faith in the true sense of the word and remain only in a formal church life.

This way of life was no different at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees could not escape formal religious life. However, the disciples who were called by Jesus abandoned their jobs, possessions, and family and followed Jesus. This is because they experienced dramatic changes in their lives through their encounter with him.

The description in verse 26 of today's text that **“the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.”** shows the tremendous shock that an encounter with Jesus brings to our lives.

However, people do not seriously think about the fundamentals of faith because they are afraid of the shock that such a deep encounter with Jesus will bring. Instead, like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' time, they try to live comfortably within the boundaries of their lives.

The problem is that our lives need fundamental change. However, people either do not realize that fact or they live their lives refusing to accept it. This life may seem problem-free on the outside, but their souls do not experience complete healing.

Verse 27 of today's text describes the reaction of people who saw what happened to a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. They are amazed and say things like; **“What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”**

At the time, people thought that healing from mental illness came from the words of Jesus' teachings. In other words, it was thought that a person's soul would be healed if he or she understood and accepted the new teachings of Jesus.

Do you agree with these people's thoughts? Do you believe that the teachings of Jesus are the source of true healing and the words of exclusive authority that cannot be imitated by people like the scribes? Also, have you had this experience?

In verse 27 the expression appears, **“even the unclean spirits obey”**, meaning that the spirit also obeys Jesus, and his teachings and authority are overwhelming.



In fact, an **“unclean spirit”** is so ingrained in us that others do not notice it. This brings worry, anger, hatred, disgust, self-pity, and pride into our minds and hearts. The world doesn't see much of a problem with this way of life. Rather, it encourages these things. And the world places a high value on overpowering those around you and getting what you want by any means necessary.

However, worry, anger, hatred, disgust, self-pity, and pride are not solved just because we decide. Although we can temporarily overcome this state of mind through efforts such as self-reflection, this state of mind reappears in our minds.

In other words, we cannot solve it with our own strength and effort. So the Bible tells us to receive the holy spirit. This means that an unclean spirit can only be replaced by a holy spirit.

If we do not have a spirit of love within us, the spirit of hatred will not go away. Also, without the Spirit of truth, the spirit of lies will not go away.

Jesus taught exactly this. He did not simply teach this with words but taught it through his life and destiny. Of course, there are many people in the world who, like Jesus, gave excellent teachings to people. Also, in the Bible, there are many people like Jesus who proclaimed God's love and truth. But there is something different about Jesus. That is, Jesus taught people what he saw himself. So his teachings had authority, unlike those of the scribes. Jesus is the one who saw and experienced God directly.

Jesus says in John 14:10: **“Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”**

Also, in John 14:9, Jesus says to Philip, **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”** Because Jesus taught what he saw, the disciples and early Christians were able to confess that Jesus was the Son of God.

The essence of God the Father is life, love, liberation, and ultimate rest. Because the disciples and early Christians received life through Jesus, they confessed that Jesus was the Christ.

Conclusion: The Holy One of God

Now let's summarize today's message. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! In verse 24 of today's text, a man possessed by an unclean spirit says to Jesus, **“I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”**

Although he was possessed by an unclean spirit, he clearly spoke about the identity of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who can heal everything: our spirit, body, and soul. He is not just a religious leader or a great person. As the Son of God, he is the only one who brought us life and salvation. Only Jesus can fill our minds and hearts with the spirit of love and holiness.

Therefore, even if meeting Jesus brings us a tremendous shock of dramatic changes in our lives, we should not be afraid and hope that we can experience Him deeply in our lives.

