

# Sermon for The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

**Date:** January 24, 2021

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 18:15–20

**Epistle Reading:** 1 Corinthians 8

**Gospel Reading:** Mark 1:21–28

**Sermon Text:** Mark 1:21–28

**Sermon Title:** Free and Clean



## Hymns:

LSB 904 – Blessed Jesus, at Your Word

LSB 919 – Abide, O Dearests Jesus

LSB 842 – Son of God, Eternal Savior

LSB 752 – Be Still, My Soul

## Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151

## Songs:

Father Make Us One

By Our Love

In Christ Alone

Way Maker

## Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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## **Text: Mark 1:21–28**

They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

And immediately 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, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. 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.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus was in Capernaum on the Sabbath and went to church. Nothing unusual about that. He was teaching, nothing unusual about that either. What was unusual was that He was teaching as one who had authority. Not like the usual teachers of that day, the Scribes. The Scribes taught as ones under the authority. Jesus taught as if He was the authority, which in fact, He is. So the people were astonished. What did it mean? Who is this Jesus?

Well, the people didn't know what to make of it, but there was one in that group who did. Mark tells us in our reading today of a man with an unclean spirit who cries out:

? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God.<sup>1</sup>

Now, several things strike me about this account so far. First, it seems as if no one knew there was a man with an unclean spirit among them. They all went to church like normal. They all sat in their regular pews, in their regular places, like normal. They saw their friends and neighbors, and everything seemed to be fine. So maybe people with unclean spirits, people possessed by demons, don't always look like raving lunatics. Maybe too much TV affects how we perceive the world around us. Sometimes, you know, they look normal, just like you and me.

Just like you and me...

Sometimes I get questions about unclean spirits and demon possession and why it seems that happened so much in Jesus' day and not so much today. Well, maybe it is happening today. Maybe those folks just look normal and regular, like that day in Capernaum. We know that Satan isn't going to rest. He doesn't grow tired like we do. In fact as the end grows closer with each day that goes by, he is, if anything, increasing his efforts to keep people away from, and separate them from, Jesus. So don't be fooled.

Isn't that the case, that we are often surprised at those who are "possessed" (in a sense) by unclean spirits? When people who are looked up to, who are in positions of power, who are leaders, suddenly become the subject of scandal? When secret addictions and possessions suddenly become known. Those who are possessed by lust, hate, or whatever fills their hearts. People become possessed with all kinds of unclean spirits, spirits of false beliefs and destructive

1 Mark 1:24

philosophies; of greed, pride, and how many more? Possessing their minds, possessing their bodies, possessing their hearts, enslaving them to sin.

I think maybe these kinds of unclean spirits are even more dangerous. At least when you see a raving lunatic you know he's a raving lunatic. You can see the danger. These others are so insidious. They seem so harmless, maybe even kind or good. Worst of all, maybe even manageable. Don't be fooled. The powerful lure leads to a powerful trap and slavery to sin. Don't be fooled when things look "normal," when everything seems all right and going well. Maybe that's the time to be most awake and alert.

Here's the second thing that struck me. The people don't know what to make of Jesus and His authoritative teaching. They're not sure who He is, but that unclean spirit knew. That unclean spirit, when it heard those words and authority, knew exactly who Jesus is. That word and authority that created the heavens and the earth, that word and authority that commands the heavenly host of angels, that word and authority that cast Satan and his followers (including this unclean spirit) out of heaven, was now on earth and speaking. So, because it could not endure those words, the unclean spirit cries out. Not only in fear, but in subjection. They know the voice of God when they hear it.

Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.<sup>2</sup>

The unclean spirit is compelled. It is no longer in control. It is forced to submit and come out. Here's the good news in this for you. Whatever sin, uncleanness or unclean spirits seek to possess you, haunt you, enslave you, or entice you, they can no longer rule you. Jesus has come. He has come to expel them and set you free.

The significance of all this lies in the fact that it is the opening skirmish in a war that will lead to the cross, where the true power of God will be seen. In Capernaum that the unclean spirits heard what Jesus had to say, but it is from the cross that all of creation hears what Jesus has to say. He said to us, "Father, forgive them." With the blood that flowed from the Lamb of God that day, the blood of the perfect and innocent One, sacrificed for the sin of the world, the blood of the New Testament, our forgiveness, our cleansing, is won. We are not expelled. We are cleansed. We are forgiven!

That is the new teaching of Jesus the people heard that day in Capernaum. They heard the Gospel. That in Him, God was reconciling the world to Himself.

2 Mark 1:25

That in Him, the Old Testament was being fulfilled. That in Him, the unclean are clean again. Jesus wasn't preaching a new Law, but the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing He came to bring. Then Jesus went beyond words. He showed it and did it. In effect, He traded places with the possessed man. Jesus would take his uncleanness and captivity to death, to set this man free. That was the new, wonderful teaching the people heard, and saw, in Capernaum that day.

That is the wonderful teaching we hear and see today. Jesus, that authority, giving that wonderful cleansing and freedom, is still in the Gospel showing up in churches all over the world today. This is the authority Jesus has now given to His Church on earth, to proclaim and give this wonderful forgiveness to all nations in His Name. He took the uncleanness and captivity of all nations on Himself on the cross. He really and truly traded places with all of us, so that we would be set free. The unclean made clean.

So when you are Baptized, that is Jesus speaking, "Come out unclean spirit!" Depart unclean spirit and make way for the Holy Spirit. You are set free from your uncleanness and your slavery to sin and death. Holy Baptism is not just water. It is the full power and authority of the cross applied to you.

When you hear the words of absolution, that is Jesus speaking, "Be silent!" To silence the accusations of Satan<sup>3</sup> against you, to silence your guilty conscience, to silence the doubts and fears within you. You are forgiven. You are clean. Absolution is not just words. It is the full power and authority of the cross applied to you.

You are set free. Free, not to return to your uncleanness and death, but free to live as a child of God. To rule over the sin in you, not be ruled by the sin in you. Just like that day in Capernaum, the voice of God has spoken. The unclean spirits know it. So believe this Word spoken to you, of forgiveness, of freedom, and of adoption!

Maybe it is hard to believe because you still feel the temptations, the pull and enticement of sin. Satan is always right there to take advantage of it all, trying to convince you that you are not a child of God, that you are not clean. He would have you think you left your Baptism behind long ago; those words of forgiveness are old.

It is not Jesus' words that are old and empty, it is Satan's words that are hollow and untrue. You are a child of God. You are forgiven and clean. You are renewed and strengthened in this truth by the powerful and authoritative voice of Jesus.

3 'Satan' is a Hebrew word that means: 'accuser.'

He speaks to you saying, “Take eat, this is My Body given for you. Take drink, this is My blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. Those words, “for you” mean what they say. They are not hollow. They are not empty. Jesus feeds you with His very Body and Blood, because you are His, you are clean, you are free. So depart in peace. Just like that man in Capernaum that day. He walked in tormented, he departed in peace. Jesus made all the difference.

However you entered this place today, whatever sins are tormenting you, whatever worries are consuming you, whatever burdens weigh you down, Jesus sets you free. That unclean spirit in Capernaum was almost right when it said that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Almost. He is your Holy One, your Savior, your forgiveness, your peace and your rest. All of this will be fully and finally revealed on the Last Day, when His resurrection becomes our resurrection. You are His and He is yours. You are clean. Depart in peace.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,  
Encourage one another in faith,  
Witness to God's love and  
Serve all people**

