

Last week we thought about letting go—giving up—ceding control to God. Jonah set an example of how NOT to let go and Simon and Andrew and James showed us people who do let go and follow Jesus. We hand God control and Grace happens.... THINGS happen....

Things happen to Jesus in pretty rapid succession in Mark. Mark is called "The Fierce Gospel" by some because it is down and dirty and to the point. Chapter one takes care of lots of exposition and BOY this is some exposition: Baptism.... Temptation in the wilderness by evil spirits... angels feeding him... getting people to quit their day jobs and join his band of roving preachers... Jesus not only teaching in the synagogue but also performing an exorcism!

A lot of you may not know this, but the Episcopal church, in our Book of Occasional Services, actually has a page addressing Exorcism. There is NOT an exorcism service in there, but it tells you what to do...

Supposedly (and this may be urban legend) every diocese has an exorcist. I don't know who it is—(it's not me, don't worry.)

Evil spirits- exorcism- scary stuff -are subjects that have been quite profitable for Hollywood. I like scary movies. Recently I went on a Netflix bender and watched several "exorcist" movies out of Priestly

curiosity. A common thread in each of them was that demons seem to like inhabiting little girls or children. Kind of like evil can't pick on someone its own size. Demons in movies need an easy target. And, we always get a shadowy character—sometimes a guy in a collar like me—who dukes it out with the demons on behalf of God almighty.

Today Jesus gets to go toe to toe with demons. A man stumbles in to the synagogue and interrupts him while he is teaching. The Markan account says that he is possessed. We of the modern mind might interpret this as the man being mentally ill – schizophrenic or something- but he was not in his right mind. So Jesus gets to show what he can do in front of the authorities and all the people of the community. He is the exorcist and he does open battle with the raw forces of evil.

The temple elite- the scribes no doubt sat up in their seats when Jesus confronted the man. They had not been able to do anything with this man, apparently. I would imagine he had been around there quite a bit and caused quite a ruckus on more than one occasion.

The demons even know who Jesus is. They are afraid of him! Jesus has a reputation as being a demon slayer, no doubt!

“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!”

I mean, This is good stuff! Very cinematic!

Jesus does his thing, and these demons come out of this man “with a loud shout.” Scholars say that the man probably “convulsed” as this force left his body. Good vs. Evil and Good wins! Even the evil ones—the forces of evil—demons—Satan—the adversary—all know who Jesus is and, they have to listen to him and do what he says.

So today we are shown that Jesus is all powerful. In the space of one chapter of Mark, we get all we need to know about him—he is God and we are not—and he has power here on earth to change things. Jesus brings with him a new world. It’s a world that is different from what the news, and the papers and the movies would have us believe.

Popular voices here in this world want us to think that evil is pretty interesting. We delight in watching the misfortunes of others during prime time, don’t we? We watch reality shows putting human misery and idiocy on display, and pain and evil become our regular entertainment every night.

Mark drives home to us today that if we are to believe who Jesus is, what he did, and how he changed this world for us, that we are supposed to proclaim some different things from what we read and see. Weakness is not that interesting, is it? It's easy for evil to target the weak and powerless- anyone can do that. But here we have this wholly divine and human son of God who can make the forces of darkness obey him and retreat in fear! Evil itself is terrified of Jesus! Evil is weak and powerless and impotent in his wake. He has the power to tell them what's what... He makes it plain to the demons that they are not in charge and to all of us that we he is God!

In the end, evil is boring and cowardly and whimpy..... Jesus and love are interesting and exciting! Thrilling, even. ... Now that Jesus has come, evil doesn't get the last word, ever. We begin to get hints that someday soon Good Friday will happen but Sunday will be close behind... Death is not the end...

Let the Gospel rearrange your thinking. We are called to proclaim to a lost and broken world that Love is not only a better option than evil but that it is what really runs things. Evil and demons may scare us

and give us nightmares, but in the end what is real is Jesus and love.

Jesus sets in motion a new world --- where God rules. AMEN.

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