

Simply Amazing

Mark 1:21 -28

31 January 2021 HUMC

Evil is very much present in our fallen world and if we are not careful, we can find ourselves in its grasp. And the only way to reduce its hold is through our personal walk with the Lord, in our corporate worship in the church and the prayerful support of others.

My Bible text is about the time when Jesus delivered an individual in the synagogue who was under the influence of a demonic or unclean spirit.

Megan will read Mark 1:21-28.

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

In the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, we are told of a supernatural incident that made our Lord stand head and shoulders above everyone else. This took place in the synagogue in the fishing community of Capernaum.

At the time, the synagogue structure allowed for guest speakers to come in and give comments on the scripture reading of the day. When our Lord got up to speak, we don't know exactly what he said, but the reaction of the congregation was one of amazement. You see the Jewish people were used to a steady diet of rabbi's quoting one another and giving their own opinions and interpretation. But when Jesus taught, he did was none of that. He spoke boldly and with great authority, taught of things from above.

Then there was something else that caused a great stir. There sat among the people, a man with an unclean spirit or demon. And incredible as it sounds, he remained undetected in this place of worship, perhaps for years. It doesn't seem possible, but it really happened.

But it was the demon within the man who could not sit still. When he heard Jesus' message, it triggered the memory of the demon, especially the time when he and other demons along with Satan were cast out of heaven by the Son of God.

Jesus spoke of this in Luke 10:18 ***I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.***

Revelation 12:1 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent that is called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world. He was cast out into the earth and his angels were cast out with him.

What I find interesting is that demon clearly identified our Lord's humanity when he called him **Jesus of Nazareth**. Then in the next breath, he confessed his divinity when he said, **The Holy One of God**. That says a lot when the unclean spirit was the only one who knew who Jesus really was.

In Biblical times, when a king invaded a country, the first thing he did was de-throne the reigning power and release any prisoners of war. And that in a sense is what Jesus had done. He removed the unclean spirit and the man was freed from his prison of evil.

When I invited Christ into my heart, my relationship with the Lord was real and personal. But at the same time, my spiritual eyes were opened and for the first time, I could sense the presence of evil that I didn't know existed.

In the course of my years of ministry, I have gone into some places where I met those who were evil beyond description. Missionaries in third world countries have told me they encountered similar situations just like the one Jesus encountered in the synagogue.

Yes, it is wonderful to have a spiritual awakening, to get to know the Lord, but it is eye opening to experience the dark side.

On the other hand, cartoon caricatures often picture the devil as some red harmless creature with a tail, horns and a pitchfork. Some sports teams have a friendly looking devil as a mascot. I realize there are those in society and social media who scoff at the idea of unclean spirits.

But consider what Paul the Apostle wrote in Ephesians 6:12. ***Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in high places.***

I suppose the presence of evil could be compared to the Bushmaster snake. This poisonous viper is found in the dense jungles of South America. The colors glimmer as the snake glides noiselessly along the ground. Though it is pleasant to look at, its bite can be fatal.

The point I want to make is that what looks nice and glamorous can be deceptive and have serious consequences. That is why we need to be careful in how we live.

If we are honest with ourselves, there may be some sins or compulsive behaviors that we can't control. But when God is our strength and with the help of others, we can manage.

That is why I like the work of:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Narcotics Anonymous.
- Overeaters Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous.
- Debtors Anonymous.
- Sex and Love Anonymous.
- Internet Anonymous.

What all these groups provide is a framework of faith, will power, determination and accountability. If a Christian believer is involved in one of these groups, I would add that the key to success that would be #1. Believe in God. #2. Confess your sins or shortcomings. #3. Ask the Lord for help. #4 Be accountability to others.

A couple of years ago, I was asked if I could sponsor someone in the fifth step of the 12-step program. The purpose was to confess and admit sins and wrongdoings from early childhood to present day to God and someone else. What I expected to last one hour stretched out to seven with breaks along the way.

When it was over, the person experienced a wonderful sense of release and forgiveness. As for me, I was exhausted but honored to be part of it.

When we pray "Deliver us from evil" in the Lord's Prayer, we are to we ask God to deliver us from things that would cause us to stumble or fall in our faith.

As a pastor, I occasionally sit in on some AA meetings and at the end; they gather in a circle and recite the Lord's Prayer. After the final Amen, they will look at each other and say "Keep coming."

In today's scripture, Jesus brought deliverance to a man who had an unclean spirit. May we find strength in the Almighty. May we find a confidant who will walk and support us.

The 12-steps are a nice reminder that we can't do it alone. We need the forgiveness and strength of God along with the support of others. 1 John 1:9 tells us: ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

We all battling sins and if we struggle in one particular area, go to the Lord and also find someone you can trust for help.

Romans 3: 23 says, "For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God."

James 5: 16 says, Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

God bless you this week and may you find someone to walk with you on your journey.