

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany Sunday Jan. 24, 2021**  
**Trinity UMC Pastor Geri Hamlen**  
**Facebook Live**

*Maybe you have noticed that we are working our way through the Gospel of Mark this year. It's taking us a whole 4 Sundays to go through just the first chapter of Mark during this Epiphany season. So those of you who have been here know that we started with the Baptism of Jesus, moved to the Community Organizing message that he was called to proclaim: Repent and believe in the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near...the time is fulfilled. Simon and Andrew, James and his brother John of the Zebedee have all left their nets to follow him.*

*This week we will hear what happened when they all went together to Capernaum, where Simon and Andrew came from.*

**Scripture** Mark 1: 21 - 28

They *all* went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came,  
Jesus entered the synagogue and taught.

They were astounded at his teaching,  
for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Just then 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 the man and crying with a loud voice,  
came out of him.

They 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."

At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The words of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

**Message** 'Community Resistance'

*Have you ever noticed that there is a force at work in the world...even as you or I or we may try to 'get organized' there's this kind of anti-organizational impulse that shows up.*

*I took my car through the car wash a few weeks ago...and the next day there was freezing rain and so who would know it was ever clean.*

*I tidy up the house, the parsonage with neat, biggest-on-the-bottom piles of books and magazines so it doesn't look so much like an absent-minded professor lives there. And in the morning, I wake to find the cats—yes, my fault for having 3 of them—have knocked over my stacks even when I thought they were safe on the top of high bookcases.*

*Those are fairly benign examples of that chaotic force at work in the world...you all probably have your own stories to tell. The reality is that many of us are really dedicated to finding a way to get organized and to stay that way. Our Methodist tradition leads us to believe that faithful living involves that kind of structure and those kinds of methods. We're Methodists, we have a method. Maybe through daily practices of prayer or reading the Bible. Maybe with regularly scheduled acts of kindness and commitment to helpful acts. Maybe with New Year's Resolutions... how's that going for you this year?*

*But then something comes along and disrupts our plans. Unravels our strategies and dis-organizes our best intentions. Resists our best efforts to keep it all running smoothly.*

*And today, in the Gospel of Mark we hear about some of the resistant forces that Jesus faced. He's already moved through the Galilean countryside. Moving along the shore of the Sea of Galilee to the town of Capernaum. He enters into the synagogue...a place that 'should' be well organized and there Jesus Teaches with authority on the Sabbath. Sharing the Good news message of God's eternal love and movement in the here and now. Telling them that it's no earthly good to just focus on the Kingdom of Heaven over there, out there, beyond this life. Because God has stuff for us to do here and now.*

*And bang...a man with unclean spirits shows up. Did you hear the Interruption...there in the middle of the Synagogue by the unclean spirits? Resistance even. The unclean spirits jump in, uninvited saying:*

*"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."*

*Those particular anti organizational forces did not want to buy into anything that Jesus was saying. But they knew him, didn't they...they called him by name—Jesus of Nazareth. 'What have you to do with us?'*

*And when Jesus called them out...rebuked even, saying...*

*"Be silent, and come out of him!" They obeyed. As unruly and chaotic as they were:*

*And the unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice,  
came out of him.*

*This is so often described as a miracle of healing but it could just as easily be considered a holy victory over unholy chaos and disruption and resistance. And it wasn't a peaceful and calm resistance. The unclean spirits didn't leave quickly and quietly. No...there were convulsions and yelling and thrashing about before they came out of the one whom they had so seriously infected. I bet the man with the unclean spirits was worn out from all of that! And the others in the synagogue, they reacted too.*

*Even watching the forces of chaos and resistance is exhausting, as we have come to see in these last months and years in our own country. How much more draining for the one who is being set free by the power of the Holy Spirit and those who witness it.*

*Eventually, of course, peace and order were restored there in the Synagogue to the point that the witnesses were amazed and had time to reflect on what it meant...that Jesus had power and authority and maybe the kingdom of heaven really was drawing nearer and nearer!  
In the Gospel of Mark, this miracle of reorganization after resistance is a foreshadowing of the greater resistance that Jesus will experience as he moves through his ministry. And it is significant that this first encounter with the forces of chaos and destruction was met with calm and steady power and authority and success. We will see that again and again in the Gospel writings. Jesus doesn't despair of resistance...he anticipates it and meets it with grace and strength and integrity. That's something for us to remember, on many levels.*

*Of course, we don't subscribe in this day and age to unclean spirits so much, do we? We live in a different time and place with different medical standards and technologies. We are much more likely to replace the phrase 'unclean spirits' with such things as: Mental illness...whether it's depression or ADD or Bipolar or Schizophrenia... And there is no doubt that Mental illness is a Dis-organizing force that works on people's lives with a strong resistance to peace and wholesome mind/body/spirit integration for the person who struggles with them.*

*We are also likely now a days to replace the phrase 'unclean spirits' with such things as: Addictions. Maybe you have known People who seem possessed, at the mercy of compulsions for food. Sex. Drugs. Alcohol. Computer games. Facebook, TV. To fast speeds or maybe inertia...never getting anything done. Compulsions and addictions are disorganizing, disruptive forces—resistant to the healthy and productive participation of those afflicted in their families and in society.*

*We are also likely in this day and age to replace the word 'unclean spirits' with words like impulses, instincts and attitudes. We read editorials and hear commentators talk about the darker angels of our nature. Like Dishonesty. Fear. Hatred. Howard Thurman, a mid-twentieth century spiritual writer and preacher highlights those as the Big 3 human attitudes that feed prejudice, inequality of opportunity and unfair treatment of groups of people—specifically, people of color in the US. Any and all of these Big 3...I'll say them again: Dishonesty. Fear. Hatred can overcome us as individuals and as groups, just like those unclean spirits in the Gospel. Dishonesty, fear and hatred flow from person to person to the culture with consequences of disruption, disturbance and resistance to community harmony, equality and justice for all.<sup>1</sup>*

*The Scripture reading this morning acknowledges that yes, unclean spirits exist in many forms, in communities, in history.*

*And so too does Jesus exist in such a way that all of the forces...not just those particular unclean spirits for that particular man in this particular reading....*

*but none of the forces that resist health and happiness and wholeness  
are strong enough to overcome the eternal love and comfort and power  
that Jesus offers us.*

*Shall I say that again? Jesus lived and died and was resurrected in such a way that  
the forces that resist health and happiness and wholeness*

*are **not** strong enough to overcome the eternal love and comfort and power  
that Jesus offers us.*

*Jesus has the authority and we too can be amazed.*

*Up to this point I have made resistance sound like a bad thing that creates chaos and destruction but that's only one side of the coin...If you flip the mirror over, think about it, Resistance is NOT just a negative and destructive force.*

*Resistance to hopelessness about our difficulties can be a beautiful thing. We as the followers of Jesus, are equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit to accept the freedom and choice that God offers us...to resist the difficulties of mental illness...with mental health professionals, with therapy groups, with medication if needed and with prayer and petition for willingness to be patient with the imbalances that can make life so difficult.*

*Resistance of hopelessness and discouragement is a valuable gift given to us by our loving God.*

*Resistance to addictions and compulsions can be a monumental struggle and yet so many of us, myself included, have found freedom from those inner demons*

*by making a decision to resist those temptations.*

*By turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.*

*By resisting destructive forces in our lives. And it starts with coming to believe that Jesus came to show us that there is a power greater than ourselves that can restore us yes to sanity and also to productive, creative, blossoming lives.*

*Jesus speaks as one who has that authority and the power to call out the unclean spirits in whatever form they take. We just have to name that reality and claim it and make a decision to live the one day at a time it takes to get past the imperious urges of those particular unclean spirits that would destroy us.*

*Resistance to dishonesty, fear and hatred...that's big. There are those who tell us that freedom from those Big 3 can only be achieved in the hearts of individuals. And that's important but that's not the whole picture.*

*All through history, groups of people have gathered together to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.*

*Groups of people gather and protest and resist...baptized followers of Jesus type groups of people who read the Gospel of Mark and realize that Jesus will provide us with the words, with the power and with the will to push back against dishonesty. And to resist fear and hatred in the name of love and truth and peace.*

*You may never have and never plan to be part of an officially organized community resistance movement like Black Lives Matter or Save the Pipeline or Whales or unborn children and I can respect that. That may be a step to big and a bridge too far for you. But...remember this... that by your baptism, you are empowered by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...to be a resistance force in this world. Jesus calls us to follow him in resistance of the evil powers of this world. And we resist on behalf of love and truth and peace...in the name of the One who can call out the unclean spirits in our own lives, in our communities, in our church, in our world as we proclaim the power and authority and love of Jesus.*

*Yes, I continue to preach with the Baptismal font right beside me as a reminder that through our baptism, the Holy Spirit has marked us for resistance to the destructive forces of the world.*

*And it may get noisy and seem chaotic and be a little bit disorganized at times as we work to make this world a little bit more like God's kingdom. But we are not alone. We have each other. And we have made a beginning just by being here and now in this time of worship. Because praising God and acknowledging the authority and the power of Jesus is Resistance—right here and right now--to chaos and destruction and hopelessness. We are all in this together. May God bless us all. Amen.*

---

<sup>i</sup> Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited, Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, p. 19.