

King of Glory Lutheran Church
January 30/31, 2021
Year B: 4th Sunday After Epiphany: Mark 1:21-28
Rev. Debra Abbott

Mark 1:21-28

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

Super heroes are big business. Wonder Woman. Spider Man. Guardians of the Galaxy. Movies, comic books, shows. And the merchandice! Super heroes seem to be everywhere in our popular culture.

People long for heroes with incredible strength and stories that are about good overcoming evil. Sometimes to find those heroes and hear those stories we have to go to the movies or open a comic book.

But this morning in our gospel reading we have just witnessed a battle between two powerful forces. Jesus and a demon.

In the first chapter of Mark's gospel Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry, there in the synagogue in Capernaum. He is teaching and people are immediately surprised because Jesus teaches them as one with authority.

Jesus is different, he speaks as though he knows what he is talking about, as if he speaks for God.

There is a power that he carries that these people have never seen or heard before. And this is just the beginning.

As he is teaching Jesus hears a man cry 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, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

Whoa. This is the reason why biblical scholars and theologians often refer to Jesus as the "Exorcist" in Mark's gospel. He has power and authority over unclean spirits. From the very beginning of his ministry Jesus heals people who are afflicted and possessed by things that hurt them and others. Things that separate them from God. Demons can't stand to be around him.

You could say that Jesus seems to have something in common with a super hero. But like no super hero we have every met in a movie or a comic book.

Now I know that exorcism stories are a stretch for some of us. These days we don't speak very often in terms of unclean spirits or demons.

But that doesn't mean that we don't understand what it is to be possessed in a way that is painful or destructive, in ways that we have no control over.

The cancer or illness that takes over a body, a struggle with addiction, the depression or anxiety that says there is no hope.

Or maybe you feel possessed by the need for more of something or everything. Or you can't stop working. Or you can't stop worrying.

We can be possessed by so many things. I know that you can name them for yourself in your own life today.

And as we look at what possesses us, those places where we feel we have no power or hope, I know that each one of us has wondered, where is God, where is our exorcist, where is our super hero?

Where was God when you lost everything? Where was God when you were afraid? Where was God when you faced suffering or death?

Maybe in those times you have thought there is no God. Or that God exists but just doesn't care.

We are exactly the people this gospel story today was written for. You are the reason this story was passed down. Mark shares this story with us today, this exorcism, this healing, so that we might know who Jesus is and what he will do for us.

Jesus doesn't hang out with people who have it all together. And he doesn't live in a safe, comfortable place. Jesus goes where there is trouble. He confronts the darkness and the pain and the fear and Jesus says, God is here.

God does not want you to be possessed by anything that would try to separate you from God and God's love for you.

God does not want us to know darkness or pain or fear. God suffers when we suffer. We know that because we know Jesus. Jesus is the one who stands with us and for us, the one who suffered and died for us.

Jesus is the good news we need today. We may not understand why there is suffering in this world or in our lives, but we know a God who meets us in our darkest moments. And God's presence and love is more powerful than fear or pain or even death.

God is here. God is with you. Confronting that which claims to have power over us with a far greater power and authority than we can ever imagine.

But God knows that we need to be reminded again and again that we are not alone and that God has the power to heal us and free us. And so God has given us signs of God's presence and power in our everyday life.

In those time when you are lost and don't think you fit in anywhere, God reaches out to claim you and tell you that you are a part of God's family through this community, through your brothers and sisters in Christ, and through all of creation so that you might know that God is with you.

But all the demons we face, no matter our age or situation, have no power when faced with the power of our God and the power of our God's love.

We worship and study and pray and serve together as a Christian community to ask for help, to find support and to hear again and again God's promise to always be with us, to help us and to love us.

God comes to us and speaks to us and helps us in many ways. Reaching out to you and me through God's Word, through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Through prayer, service, music, and through the body of Christ. That's you and me.

You know I'm going to be honest. When I think of all the demons we face as individuals and as a community I too long for a super hero to come and save me, save us.

I look to Jesus and I wonder how did he face down demons, preach, teach, heal and forgive? We have the answer in this story of teaching and healing today.

Jesus gathered people together and taught them about God. He saw and knew each person he encountered. And today he heard and saw the man with the unclean spirit. He healed this man and that man's life was changed. God came to him and knew his suffering and gave him new life. It may seem small, healing one person at a time, but we know what it meant for that man.

In this past year we have known super heroes that have changed the world one person at a time. Super heroes working at the grocery store, in a nursing home, teaching children, fighting fires. We are surrounded by super heroes. People who have the power to send demons running. Because God has given them and you and me the power of God's love.

Jesus' authority and wisdom and power comes from love. He is more amazing than any super hero we can dream up. And the love of Jesus is our super hero strength as well. Love has the power to bring hope, to forgive, to make us laugh, to change lives and to cast out what keeps us from God.

I pray that you may be healed this day, freed of what has a hold on you, freed to serve and love your neighbor.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.