



**Proper 4, Year B – February 1, 2009**  
Mark 1:21-28

**A Homily preached by the Rev'd James J. Popham**

Mark never wastes a word or a minute. The immediacy of his Gospel is ever apparent. In the Greek translation of today's gospel, Jesus does not just enter the synagogue, he strides into it. He virtually oozes authority. Today in Capernaum, he is the local boy made good, who astounds the crowd that he speaks with an air of authority unknown to even the scribes. But, of course, it is not his mannerisms, or his tone of voice, or his self-confidence that commands authority. It is his authenticity. He is the real deal. His connection with God the father is genuine, complete, and palpable.

And just in case the reader is not convinced, Mark pits Jesus against a demon, which Jesus promptly exorcises with none of the ritual and drama one might have been led to expect by movies like *The Exorcist*. Jesus authority is so real that the demons flee at his word. They know who Jesus is. They know they are subject to his authority.

What Mark wants us to understand is that in Jesus, God has conquered evil. In the final analysis, evil will not prevail. That's the good news.

In the meantime, however, we live in a world where evil persists. That's the bad news. In fact, the evil in the world is so pervasive and entrenched that it defies human comprehension, much less a human solution. This is why Mark puts only in Jesus' hands the authority to cast out demons. Still, as God's creatures, as Christians, as Anglicans, as members of Christ Church, we are called to speak out against evil...and to cast out demons, relying always on the authority of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, I hope, obviously, when we speak of casting out demons, we are not referring to ritualistic exorcism. We mean confronting our own demons and the larger demons that pervade society.

How we confront evil in the world is in itself a chore that requires careful attention. If we are to be God's instruments in eradicating evil in the world then we must take care that the means we choose meet the ends. Even when the evil staring us in the face is overwhelming and utterly offensive, we dare not meet evil with evil.

Let me offer an example...the great and pervasive societal evil of racism. I chose racism because it is familiar to me, but any number of evil "isms" might come to mind. And, again, the issue is not whether racism is evil. It is. The issues are how we address evil and the much more complex and challenging matter of how we react to and interact with people who perpetrate that evil.

Our response must be informed by our understanding that some evils are far larger than individual sin. These are evils, like racism, that become part of the framework and fabric of a society, a culture, a community...even a country. In such a culture saturated with racism or a similar evil, the evil is not only condoned, assumed and nurtured. Its insinuation into the psyche and worldview of the culture is so great that it might be considered part of the DNA of the culture. It becomes a corporate or societal evil. Are children reared in such a society culpable...or are they victims themselves even as they victimize others? After all, in the words of

Again, evil must be identified and condemned, as should the evil acts that perpetuate the evil and visit its effect on others. But we might pause before we leap to condemn unreservedly other people, other children of God, who in a different way have been

victimized by a corporate evil that has grown to exceed the simple sum of its constituent individual evil acts. These corporate evils possess a society just as the unclean spirit possessed its victim in Mark's gospel. Great care must be taken to call out and cast out only the evil. Eradicating evil is one thing. But our treatment of the evildoer must recall that Jesus addressed and cast out the demon. He did not condemn the man possessed.

Thus, we are to cast out demons, but not to demonize.

Amen.

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