

Sermon Notes for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Mark 1:21-28

Psalm 111

Today we hear Jesus as he begins his ministry in the Synagogue of Capernaum, in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has been baptized by John, called God's Beloved, come out of the wilderness, and even called his first disciples—all before he enters the synagogue to teach on the Sabbath. Mark wants us to know that there is something amazing and powerful about Jesus as he teaches—not like the scribes the people usually hear. And then, it happens—he is challenged. A man with an unclean spirit asks if Jesus comes to destroy them. Jesus rebukes him and silences the man—and then demon comes out—a description that ends with the man perhaps falling to the ground and crying out.



It may be hard for us to imagine this in the context of an exorcism—exorcism as we might imagine in the movies, but to Mark and the community listening, this calling out of the unclean spirit has something to do with Jesus and his authority from God—. Jesus has come to teach, to heal, to declare God's presence in their midst. Jesus has come to bring Good News.

Perhaps we would not imagine an actual demon being released from the man, but the artist Friesach captures a moment of release and freedom as he imaged the story during the Middle Ages. I like that a friend catches him and holds him up and the demon is almost gone.

Konrad von Friesach, 1450. Cathedral of Gurk, Austria - on cloth



In a contemporary relief, Jesus reaches out to touch and heal. This image is from the doors to the cathedral. It appears that fear moves the man away and yet his hands seem to reach toward Jesus. The longing to be healed, to have the things that have power over us that are not of God are even today, sometimes called demons. Jesus declares God's Kingdom is near, that we no longer need to be possessed by the things that disrupt our lives and the lives of the people we love.

In this relief, there is no person that "catches" the man. Perhaps as pilgrims and worshipers entering the cathedral we are invited to be amazed and to come follow Jesus—and heal one another.

Ulrich Henn, 2008, St. James Cathedral, Seattle, Washington