

28/01/2024 Mark 1:21-28

The Gospels present to us Jesus as the great purifier.

- It's worth thinking about this as modern people
- Because we can think that good and evil
- Is only about what is fair or unfair
- Or about what reduces or causes harm.
- But it's a part of being human that we can experience evil
- In being *unclean*: in being somehow unfit
- To come into contact with other human beings
- Or to come into the presence of God

In Jesus' place and time, in the Old Covenant, this uncleanness

- Was seen in bodily things like contact with corpses
- Or in having skin diseases, or even genital discharge.
- So, in the Gospels we read that Jesus cleansed people:
- That he touched corpses and brought people to life.
- That he healed the lepers, and the woman with the discharge.
- So, in the Gospels Jesus is the One who cleansed
- Who made people fit for life with God.

In the New Covenant Jesus made clear that what defiles us,

- What makes us unclean for life with God, comes from within
- Listen to what Jesus says later in Mark's Gospel to his disciples:
- **'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'** Mark 7:20-23
- Today I'm proclaiming Good News from the Gospel:
- Jesus has authority over evil
- He brings cleansing to us by his word
- Cleansing from all that would keep us from life with God.
- His life pointed the way to the great cleansing

- That would happen on the cross
- Through Jesus' sacrificial death we are cleaned
- And we are made fit to enter into life with God.

Here's how today's reading begins: **They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.**

- 'They': Jesus and his first disciples:
- Simon, Andrew, James and John
- So we are at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry:
- He has been baptised; tempted in the desert
- He has begun to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom
- He has called his first disciples
- And now he goes to Capernaum
- Capernaum: on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee
- The town of Simon and Andrew
- On the sabbath he goes to the synagogue:
- The place of prayer, reading,
- And instruction in the law and prophets
- Going to the synagogue on the Sabbath was Jesus' custom,
- And in the synagogue he taught.

These are the first words regarding his teaching:

- **They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**
- The stand out word here is 'authority'
- Not one opinion among many: but a definitive word
- This would make people sit up and listen:
- He teaches with authority, *but does he have authority?*

What then happens next reveals the nature of his authority:

- **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.'**

- An unclean spirit: think about the imagery here
- The emphasis is not on culpability, on assigning blame
- But on the need to be made clean:
- Even think of a baby needing to have a nappy changed....
- Jesus exposes by his teaching that which makes unclean
- And the unclean spirits know who Jesus is,
- And they know that he has power to cleanse.

What happens next is perhaps unexpected:

- **But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'**
- This command for silence is a theme in the Gospels
- Not just with the unclean spirits
- But also with those who are healed
- And even with his own disciples: why?
- One way to think about it:
- We naturally project on to others in power
- What we would like them to come to be for us:
- So, think about politicians when they campaign
- And when they are voted in: people express their hopes
- But then there is the reality of what actually happens:
- It's only in actions that reality is revealed

What it means for Jesus to be the Holy One of God

- Will only become clear
- Through his suffering, death, and resurrection
- In other words: Jesus' overcoming the forces of death
- Will happen only through the path of the cross:
- Through his path, and through our path as we follow him.
- We can have our idea of who Jesus should be
- And that path that he should take
- But God's word reveals to us the reality
- Of what it takes God to cleanse us from sin
- And to wash us from everything that would make us unclean:

- It takes nothing less than the blood of Christ shed on the cross

It is Jesus, who is on this path

- Who is beginning to publicly exercise his authority:
- His authority in teaching in words and in actions
- So, when Jesus commands the unclean spirits, they obey
- This is what we hear: **And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.**
- Jesus' word is performative: when he speaks there is action,
- And the word that he speaks makes clean:
- The unclean spirit leaves the man.

The crowd again express their astonishment:

- **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.'**
- Jesus' teaching, his word has cleansing power
- So that the powers that defile must give way.
- The narrative concludes: **At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.**
- Jesus' has called his first disciples
- And his work of overcoming the powers of death has begun.

This is who Jesus is: the cleanser

- His blood washes us clean, so that we
- Who are defiled by the things that comes from within
- Can approach God with confidence.
- So come: come to God in prayer
- Come to be with God's people Sunday by Sunday
- Come and receive the body and blood of the one
- Who has authority, and who exercises this authority
- To cleanse us, and to bring us life with God.