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The Power of Jesus
Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, Jesus 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 ^a commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

We have a *slightly crazy family*.

It's helped us get through some tough spots.

Crazy nicknames, slogans, limericks—and we say lots of words backwards.

Don't start with the word Tulsa.

The name may be Williams, but we also have a family picture of the ***Brady Bunch***, with our faces cut out and pasted over theirs.

On special occasions everyone usually gets two cards—a serious one, and a funny one.

I have some favorites I've given my baby brother. One of his birthday cards said, “You know how every family has someone in it who is shockingly normal?” And inside it said: “We should get ourselves one of those! Happy Birthday.”

He sent me one a few years ago I still have in my office.

It says, “Every time I feel like nobody understands me, it helps me to think of you! And inside it says, “Because nobody understands you either!”

Ahh...siblings.

Doesn't *everyone have* a slightly (or more than slightly) crazy family?

Don't most people have some truly crazy relatives?

I have a ***crazy aunt*** who's a wonderful artist,

but we just never know what she'll say or do.

Who are the crazy people in *your family*? Got any? Sure you do.
Aren't you thinking about them right now?

We all know crazy people.

Without fail, *every family* has them—those people who will show up just when everything is going right, and suddenly you don't know what hit you.

It's the same thing in *churches*.

Every church, everywhere, no matter what size, shape, or denomination.

Things can be sailing along just fine in a worship service, or a committee meeting, or a program, and out of the blue---

someone shows up with some wild hair or off the wall remark,
or some truly bizarre idea.

The mantra for families and churches should be, as I've said before—
expect the unexpected.

One reason is because churches have crazy people.

And right now, aren't you thinking about them?

I could tell all kinds of stories of interesting encounters as a pastor,
with crazy people...

Crazy people show up out of the blue, when you least expect it,
just like this man with an unclean spirit showed up at the temple that day—
crying out to Jesus,

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us?"

I think that churches *attract crazy people* because we're the church.

We welcome everyone.

And that's not a bad thing.

For one thing it means *you and I* get to come in!

But seriously, welcoming crazy people is true to the gospel.

Look at *Jesus' own ministry*.

It's the demon *possessed* who first know who Jesus is.

In the Gospel of Mark the demons always know who Jesus is,
even when Jesus' own followers do not know who he is.

This man is possessed, but the evil spirits know that He is the Holy One of God.

And *Jesus does a lot with the demon-possessed.*

Of the 13 healings in the Gospel of Mark,

4 involve Jesus casting out demons! Why?

Why is it important for Jesus to cast out demons?

I wonder if it has to do with the *kind of power* Jesus brings in his ministry.

The power of Jesus is different than other religious leaders.

The gospel says *They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* ²³

What does it *mean that Jesus has the power* to cast out demons?

What does it mean that *his authority*, was not like the scribes?

Let's think about what healing means to the man with the unclean spirit---

You know, casting out this man's demon---it meant bringing him *wholeness*.

It meant making him *clean* again---where he could be in *relationship* with his family, the community, with fellow worshippers.

Jesus' power and authority ultimately came from *love*.

The scribes and Pharisees were so concerned about God's *law*,

But not always as concerned about God's love.

When Jesus healed people—he was showing God's love.

And what did it mean for someone *to have a demon*? An unclean spirit

Not everyone agrees on what demon possession in the Bible *really is*.

Some say we're dealing with the first century equivalent of *mental illness*.

Some say it is definitely the realm of the *demonic*, and Satan,

others just don't know.

Well, I can't say for sure what was happening with this man.

But I do believe there are demons in this world.

That there is a Devil, the Bible wisely calls him our Adversary.

And I think that the *spiritual realm of human life is real*, and important.

I may not understand it all, but I believe it's very real.

And I think just when we are trying to follow Jesus,

Just when we are listening and following God—when things seem to be going

well, that is so often the time *we are hit hard* by all that is not well.

That can be the very time that evil comes knocking at our door.

In the *Streams in the Desert* devotional last week,
The author spoke about how just when we receive something worthwhile from
God, that is often the time the Devil comes seeking to destroy us!
Just like when David was anointed king,
that's when the Philistines set out in full force to get him.

The good news is that ***power is developed through resistance---***
when we come up against all that is evil in this world,
it develops our spiritual muscles!

Has that ever been ***true in your life?***
I know it has in mine!
I don't like this truth of Christian life,
but experiencing it has made me a stronger person.
I think the same is true for our church.

I don't think it's any coincidence that ***Jesus' ministry begins*** with his baptism
and God calling him the Beloved...
and ***right after that*** he is led into the wilderness for 40 days of tempting and testing
with Satan.
Talk about developing his spiritual muscle!
That was his preparation for his public ministry.
And here, in Capernaum, he puts ***his power and authority to the test***.
And look what happens!

You know, I've always liked what theologian C.S. Lewis says about the
demonic....he says that we should ***not ignore demons***,
nor should we give them too much attention
(which is exactly what they would want!).

His little book called ***The Screwtape Letters***, is a humorous and serious look at this
often ignored realm of the Christian life.
The book is letters from Satan to a junior demon, on how to attack Christians.
Sounds crazy, but it's a great book, and so true about the life of faith.

When it comes to understanding the spiritual realm,
And people possessed by demons,

I think that '*demons*' *can be more* than just little guys running around in red suits....I think we can be possessed by all kinds of demons.

Ever *felt like you had a demon* on your back?
Something that just *weighed you down, or held you hostage*, or bound you?

Whatever was wrong with this man in Mark,
we know that this man was *deemed crazy* by everyone around him.
And he was *unclean*—unfit for life in the community, especially for worship.
He was an outsider, a marginalized person who was ostracized,
and demonized by those who saw him—much like severely mentally ill people
living on the streets are today.

But it was *this man*, this man with an unclean spirit, who *knew Jesus*' identity!
Sometimes the disciples don't even understand who Jesus is,
or what he's come to do....
but the demons sure do!

It's easy to *get upset* about crazy people and situations.
That's our usual response.
How did that crazy person get in here?
Or why is this person acting so crazy?
Where did that crazy comment come from?
Sometimes we try to just IGNORE them!

Sometimes the crazies are the loudest voices,
So it can be tempting to *give into* crazy people and their agenda—
We can listen to the angry voices, the ones who want to disrupt, the people who
seem bent on wreaking havoc.
Sometimes this is the path of least resistance.
We think, ok, they're crazy, but I guess you can have it your way.

But look at what Jesus did.
He *didn't ignore* him.
He *didn't give into* him.

Instead, He speaks *truth and freedom* to him.
"*Be silent, and come out of him!*"
Jesus *delivers* the possessed man.
What does that *mean*, practically?

It means he is ***no longer an outsider. No longer unclean.***

Jesus essentially gives him a ***whole new life***, by driving out the demons!

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.

Speaking ***truth and freedom.***

Deliverance.

Restoration to relationships, and community, and wholeness.

That's power.

That's the power of Jesus!

Isn't that the ***same power*** that Jesus has in our lives today?

Freedom, and deliverance?

Restoration of relationships?

I sure think so!

What does that mean ***for you?***

What is ***holding you hostage?***

Weighing you down?

What needs to be cast out of your life?

Do you realize, that we can bring that---all of that---to Jesus,

And He is the one who offers us freedom and new life!

Healing, and wholeness!

I want you to just sit with that for a minute—***think*** about what that means.

The demons of your life---they are nothing compared to the power and authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord!

If that's not good news, I don't know what is!

And, what if ***we followed His lead***, as Christians?

What if we worked to make everyone ***feel welcome, and be in relationship?***

What if we wanted to show people a path to ***truth & freedom?***

What if we showed them ***the One*** who could bring them such new life?

Isn't that what **salvation** from Jesus Christ is all about?
Freedom, forgiveness, and new life!

And, aren't **we all** a little bit crazy?
Don't we all need truth and freedom?
Don't we all need to be delivered by Jesus, in some form or fashion?

All of us, we who at times call other people "crazy",
are precisely the people who find ourselves possessed
at different times in our own lives, right?

Who among us hasn't been possessed by **anger** before?
Or maybe a wave of **loneliness**?
Have you ever been possessed by **envy**? **Greed**? **jealousy**? **revenge**?
Maybe a **grudge** you can't give up?

Doesn't each one of us have something holding us **hostage**,
something that possesses our body or soul, that keeps us from being free,
and enjoying life the way God intended us to have it?

Each of us has been **driven crazy** before by something or someone,
Each of us has been **possessed** by a sense of something that is not quite right.

And Jesus says to the spirits that bind us---*be silent and come out!*

Isn't this **why we come to Jesus**, even if we don't realize it?

Pastor Samuel Candler put it this way,
*"The healthy church is where each of us can bring **our craziness** face to face with Jesus. The healthy church is where each of us can bring **our madness** to the love and holiness of Jesus."* (Rev. Samuel G. Candler, Dean Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta, GA, Day 1, "The Crazies", Jan 26, 2006)

Friends, hear the **Good News** of the Gospel. It's ok to be a little bit crazy.
It means **you'll fit right in** here at church.

And when you come to this place, to this family of faith, you'll find lots of friends
and neighbors who love you....And I know that you'll find Jesus waiting for you—
with healing, wholeness, and freedom. **NEW LIFE**.

And to that, all God's people said,
Amen.