

Kingdom Carefronting
Deuteronomy 18: 15-20 and Mark 1:21-28
January 31, 2021
Eastminster Presbyterian Church

The writers of each Gospel had particular audiences in mind when speaking about Jesus, and so the similar stories or themes have a deep richness on their own and even deeper when understood together.

For instance, Matthew emphasizes the teacher in Jesus. Jesus, in Luke's gospel, is most often seen as a healer for the ill, hope for the captives, good news for the poor. In John, Jesus is mysterious. He mysteriously creates abundance by making more wine from water and setting out a mega meal of fish and bread. And for Mark, well, Jesus is a bit of all these combined. Jesus is busy, busy, busy healing, caring, providing, preaching, and teaching.

But, unlike the birth stories of Matthew and Luke, or the mysteries of John, Mark introduces Jesus at his entry point into ministry, and then it is just a hop, skip and jump to a confrontation with an unclean spirit, on the Sabbath and in the synagogue, no less. It is here where Jesus has been amazing the listeners as he speaks with authority about scripture.

Out of the shadows a man emerges, and all the holy gathered there, hear these words: What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? And then comes this amazing confession not only about the humanity of Jesus, but also his divinity: I know who you are, the Holy One of God!

The heckler knows himself to be unclean and Jesus the one who cleanses. Whether the man is demon possessed, medically ill or mentally unbalanced, we do not know, but these synagogue-going people know something is amiss.

Like a big reveal, we do not have to wait until the end or even the middle of the book to see who Jesus is and what Jesus has come to do. Right off the bat, the story sets Jesus up with kingdom authority. And Mark, who identifies Jesus as a no-nonsense, get-to-the-point person, shares Jesus' words of authority to the demon, "Be silent, and come out of him." Jesus commands, and right there in the middle of this holy space, the power of evil is confronted and conquered. In this moment, the Son of God looks a demon-possessed man square in the face and the evil is no match. The unclean, convulsing, screaming demon is hurled out of the body; and this man, once thought unclean is bathed in hope and second chances.

We are reminded that Jesus came to oppose any forces that try to steal away the joyful and abundant life God wants for us. It is good and right for us to know Jesus as teacher, healer, provider, but if we do not understand and affirm that all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to him, we just might be setting ourselves up for a bit of confrontation.

But as to not sound so ominous, it is actually out of this "care-fronting" that the man, and we, find Jesus willing and ready to release and free us from the unclean spirits within our own lives.

Jesus knows, and we know, that often the only way to the spiritual healing of a loved one is to “carefront” them, to help them face the reality of a need for change.

Mark reminds us it is the one possessed who shouts out his own fear, knowing that Jesus can change him. He knows he needs kingdom carefronting. If an unclean spirit can recognize the need for Jesus and trust Jesus to cleanse, then the same is true for you and me, sinners that we are. Because, in honesty, from Mark’s brief description of this person, he could be anyone of us. We have things pushed down far inside of us that we believe it would be hard for Jesus to want to heal our broken souls.

But through this man, Mark reminds us of our souls’ need for the Spirit. We need to hear the Word of God. And we need to believe we can be healed from those things that separate us from the power and kingdom authority of Jesus. And God already knows everything we have done, everything that has ever happened to us, all that we are, and promises to be the keeper of our souls. Jesus has been given the authority to break all barriers that seek to keep us at a distance from our Triune God.

I believe, in our time, we are all standing face to face with the Holy and the evils of the world will still not win. Jesus is still willing and ready to release and free us from the unclean spirits within each of us and the collective unclean spirits of all on earth. But we have to put ourselves in moments and places where carefronting can take place. We need to find ourselves in the presence of Jesus. We have to be willing to acknowledge that all authority on earth and in heaven belong to him. We have to know in our hearts and speak prophetically that Jesus is the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, our teacher, healer, hope, Good News, and cleanser of our souls.

If you feel yourself at a distance from our Lord, hear his invitation to dare to come close enough to be cleansed and released from all that seeks to separate you from God. May our world be shaken up by the kingdom authority and power of Jesus who still sends evil running and stands ready to restore us and our world to good and to reconcile us to a right relationship with each other and God. I pray kingdom carefronting for all of God’s people. Amen