

Jesus, unclean spirits & I

*They went to Capernaum,
and when the Sabbath came, Jesus
went into the synagogue and began to
teach.*

This morning Mark invites us
into quite an adventure.

We join Jesus' disciples
and the people of Capernaum
as they make their way
into the synagogue.

Jesus gets up and starts teaching.

*The people were amazed
at his teaching,
because he taught them
as one who had authority, not as the
teachers of the law.*

Mark's storytelling zooms in
and the anonymous crowd
turns into an assembly of individuals
with feelings and emotions.

One can almost hear the murmur
and the occasionally held breaths.

We aren't told
what exactly Jesus said that day,
but browsing through the paragraphs

and chapters before and after this story gives us some idea.

"The kingdom of God is at hand.
Believe in the Good News!"

This is what Jesus proclaims
only a few verses before our story starts.

On the next page of our bibles we read:

"Son, your sins are forgiven."

and a bit later:

"I did not come to call the righteous,
but sinners."

The people of Capernaum
were probably used to messages
that spoke of rule conformity
and score keeping,
preached by scribes
who would have easily been offended
by Jesus' exclamation:

"The Sabbath was made for man,
not man for the Sabbath."

No wonder that the people were amazed at Jesus' new teaching.

Especially if we consider that people then, unlike us, did not have mind-blowing content at their fingertips, 24/7.

Ancient TED talk streaming hadn't been invented yet.

They were used to hearing from teachers that were deeply familiar with scripture.

However, once Jesus starts speaking
his listeners intuitively
sense, hear, smell and taste
the author of those very scriptures.

I, personally am often
like the folks in the synagogue that day: my own
familiarity with the bible
keeps me from being astonished
by Jesus' words.

Being captivated, blown away
by the Divine is nothing
one can manufacture.

Awe is the result of Christ
speaking his words and love into our lives.

We are two verses into this bible passage and could
actually already call it a day.

But Mark amps up his rich storytelling
and draws us in even further:

*Just then
a man in their synagogue who was
possessed
by an impure spirit cried out, "What do
you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?
Have you come
to destroy us?
I know who you are—
the Holy One of God!"*

If I picture myself
among the worshippers that day,
I'm inclined to get quite annoyed
at the unruly, noisy guy
who destroys the awe-filled atmosphere.

But wait a moment!

It is with some discomfort
as I understand that this troublemaker could actually
be me.

Yes, at times I find myself being the congregant
who's amazed
by Jesus' teaching,
yet more often than I'd like to admit
I feel hash opposition to his message welling up
inside me.

The intruder in our story
represents the true nature
of all people in that synagogue back then, and also
all of us here today.

His appearance sums up
the human condition.

In all of us are inner forces at work
that cry out against
Jesus' live-giving message.

For some of us, the inner voice
is as aggressive as the one in this narrative.

Others are prone to withdraw
when challenged by Christ's goodness
and some are trapped in obsessing
over what their surrounding
might think of them.

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!"

*The impure spirit
shook the man violently
and came out of him
with a shriek.*

The truth is: many don't get to experience a life-changing Jesus-moment like this.

For most of us it's more of a journey to Christ-given wholeness.

And that's ok.

We can still embrace this unnamed troublemaker as a fellow-pilgrim.

He encourages us to go ahead and confront Christ with all 'unclean spirits' that dwell inside us.

Jesus is not afraid or appalled by them.

On the contrary, he longs to still the voices and to set free the person he has created us to be.

We all do well if we set out to getting to know the forces that are our very own 'impure spirits':

resentment, pride, deception, envy, greed, gluttony, love for power, laziness, ...

The list goes on.

Christ is here, ready to hear our frustration, accusation and desperation.

He is here, ready to set us free.

*The people were all
so amazed that they asked each other,
“What is this?
A new teaching—
and with authority!
He even gives orders
to impure spirits
and they obey him.”*

Countless accounts from scripture,
from history and from those around us
re-tell this gospel story in their own way:

stories of liberation, of growth,
of ‘coming to Jesus moments’.

May they be the fuel that keeps us going.

May they ignite hope
when we feel beyond redemption.

And may we offer our own personal stories to one
another, so that even today
Mark 1:28 would be true:

*News about him
spread quickly
over the whole region.*

Amen.