

EPIPHANY 4 B Deut. 18:15-20 1 Cor. 8:1-13 Mark 1:21-28

WHAT DEMONS DID YOU BRING TO CHURCH TODAY?

What demons did we bring into church this morning?

Hurt feelings, resentment, lack of forgiveness, anger, fear,
mistrust, prejudice, hatred, apathy, boredom, conceit?

Jesus went in to teach at a synagogue in Capernaum.

He was the guest preacher like at any church, in any town,
a church filled with the ordinary folk that come to services,
Doctors, Lawyers, Construction workers, Teachers,
Homemakers, Old, Young.

All sorts and conditions of folk gathered together to worship God
and hear a message of hope. And there was him. The demoniac.
The man filled with a demon.

Which one was he? Did he stand out as the one that didn't quite fit?

Could Jesus scan the congregation from his perch in the pulpit
and pick out the one filled with demonic pain and suffering?

Probably not. He was probably one of
the regular folk that worked and played
and carried on in the life of the congregation.

Living a life of normality yet filled with something that held him back,

tore him down, filled him with dread and anxiety. A demon!

A force of darkness and despair. A spirit of harm and hurt.

A disfigurement of the God image inside all of us.

A spiritual malady that saps his strength and saddens our heart.

No one knew the pain and suffering of this poor man

until Jesus came near him

and the very demons that were tormenting his soul

cried out to Jesus.

They cried out of fear that Jesus would somehow

stop the torment and pain and the demons wanted no part of that.

The demon would hold on to it's victim.

Would continue the pain and suffering – the hurt and anxiety.

They wanted no part of this Jesus that threatened to do harm –

to harm itself.

And Jesus called to this man's demon.

Jesus called to the man's hurt and pain.

His suffering and anxiety. His despair and fear.

"Shut up and come out of this man."

And the demon, the pain, the despair and anxiety

fled from their host. At the sound of Jesus.

At the voice of the very Word of God, they heard and obeyed.

What demons did we bring into church today?

We can't look around and spot the tormented.

We can't see the demonic forces, the hurts and fears

in our sisters and brothers. People don't show their demons.

They hide them away behind masks of respectability,

happiness, friendliness, piety, or even indifference.

But be assured, the demons are there.

Most of us are hiding something.

Buried something down deep within our own souls.

Things we bring out to turn over in the company of our own minds.

Issues we try to conceal, hurts we try to forget,

memories we try to erase.

Oh, but we're strong. We can keep these things

from affecting our lives. We can resolve our own issues.

We don't need anyone or anything to purge our demons.

In fact, we might not even think we have any.

Maybe a little setback now and again, but if we're strong,
we can fight them off and everything will be fine.

And then the truth comes near us. Just like when the Truth of God,
Jesus, came near the pitiable man in the synagogue.

And the hurts and pains, memories and fears
come rushing out in a contorting, paralyzing stream of bile and tears.

We all have hurts and fears, torments and pain inside us.

We are frail people in a broken world.

We have caused hurts and we have received hurts.

Too often we hide them away behind masks of OK-ness
because we don't want to admit our fallibility to anyone,
or even to ourselves.

These hurts and fears can become demonic –
such powerful forces in our lives

that they take on a life of their own.

They control us, limit us and eventually destroy us
if we don't expel them from our souls.

As the man in the synagogue learned,

Jesus, the Holy one of Israel can purge us of those things
that hold us down, keep us from living out a full and happy life,
free of the masks that distort our image of the world
and distort others image of us.

The church is all about **restoration**.

Restoration of our image into that of the image of God.

An image distorted by sin.

It is also about clarifying our image of God and God's creation.

This is the image distorted by the forces of fear,
distrust, resentment, anger and despair
that become the demons of our lives.

This is the image made clear by Christ coming near to us
and calling to the hurt in our lives.

Christ comes near us in the sacraments of the church.

The sacrament of unction, or healing.

The laying on of hands and anointing with oil

accompanied by the prayers of the community.

This is the sacramental way of purging our souls of those things
which have become our demons.

The healing of memories, hurts, fears.

This, often coupled with the sacrament of penance,

or the **Reconciliation of a Penitent, or Confession**

are the sacraments of **reunion**. The sacraments of re-imagining.

Please turn to **Page 861** in the **Book of Common Prayer**.

Q. What is Reconciliation of a Penitent? A.

Reconciliation of a penitent, or penance, is the right in which

those who repent of their sins may confess them to God

in the presence of a priest

and receive the assurance of pardon

and the grace of absolution.

I invite you to think about using this sacrament

especially during Lent which is coming up.

May God richly bless you, heal you and keep you! Amen.