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**Title:** I Know Who You Are

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**Text:** [Mark 1:21-28](#)

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Mark is in a hurry. We mentioned this last week. The word “immediately” is used 59 times in the whole of the New Testament and 41 of those are in the Gospel of Mark. Just look at it, today we’re only 21 verses into the first chapter and Jesus has shown up, got baptized, fled into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, picked four of his

disciples, and traveled to Capernaum. We’re only halfway through the first chapter and I’m exhausted. Mark is clearly in better shape than I am (no snide comments under your breath here).

Today, we find Jesus and his entourage as they enter the synagogue on the Sabbath. Upon entering, Jesus begins to teach. Keep in mind the synagogue is not the temple. The temple was in Jerusalem – that’s where the rituals would have been performed. But every town with any Jewish population would have had a synagogue. It was a place of meeting for the study of the scripture and may have even met in homes like the early church. But especially on the Sabbath, Jews would have been in the synagogue and it was the Sabbath.

It was common in these synagogues for a visiting rabbi or teacher to be asked to teach when they were passing through. That is still the custom today even in some of our churches. I knew of this tradition when I traveled for our denominational office as I worked helping churches with building projects. One church visit took me to Brooklyn, New York for a Sunday afternoon meeting. I scheduled my flight into New York JFK to land about the time the worship would be ending. A church member had offered to pick me up at the airport and all was well until we arrived at the church. To my surprise, the service was still going on. I was ushered to the pulpit and asked to bring the sermon for the day.

I have no idea what I said that day but I’d like to apologize to that congregation. I know it couldn’t have been good or even coherent. However,

after that, I never visited another church without having a sermon in my pocket just in case.

Jesus was more prepared when he went to Capernaum than I was when I went to Brooklyn. That Sabbath, he not only taught but taught with authority. I love how Mark gets a dig in at the scribes in his writing. Did you catch it? The scribes would have been the professional class of Jewish legal scholars and they would have been the usual teachers on a normal day except when a visiting teacher might show up. Mark, in describing Jesus' teaching, says that those present "were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Mark 1:22). Ouch!

What this tells us is that from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, there is already confrontation...Jesus with authority, scribes with no authority and that doesn't sit well with the scribes. But what happens next is why the story is here. There was a man who cries out and interrupts the teaching. Mark tells us this man had an "unclean spirit." Scholars have debated for centuries exactly what this means and we still don't know. We do know that people of that time believed that places and animals and people could be possessed by demons. We still believe that but to a lesser extent than they would have. Movies like *The Exorcist* and all the sequels prove that this is something to which people can still relate.

The demons in this story speak through the man and they know who Jesus is, "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." (Mark 1:24). It strikes me that the clean folks in this story – the scribes in this case – don't know who Jesus is but the unclean man does. That's just like Jesus though, caring about those we'd rather ignore. Jesus responds with seven words – "Be silent and come out of him!" (Mark 1:25). Jesus backs up his authority by not only teaching with authority but acting out his teaching with authority as well.

Those who were present that day were amazed and said again to one another that he teaches with authority only this time my translation has an exclamation point after "with authority!" They are amazed that he can command even the unclean spirits. It was at that moment for Mark that the fame of Jesus began to spread throughout Galilee. For Mark, Jesus' actions are his message.

Since we're going to be in Mark for a while, another thing that I want you to look for in the weeks ahead is the number of times that Jesus tells people to keep silent about his identity. Here, he tells the demons to "Be silent and

come out of him" but we'll see this trend throughout the Gospel. When Jesus heals someone, he'll tell them to go and don't tell anybody. Scholars call this the "messianic secret." We can only make some guesses as to why Jesus does this.

Again and again, Jesus says "my time has not yet come." My grandfather used to say to me when I was anxious to do something or get someplace – "all in due time, my boy." Jesus knew that all would be revealed in God's timing and that timing was "not yet." Another possibility is that Jesus didn't want to be followed around because of his miracles. If we're following Jesus because of what he can do for us and not because we've identified him as the "Holy One of God," we've got our reasoning turned around.

Jesus did not want to become known as a "Mr. Fixit." He did not want people to find room in their hearts for him only because they thought he was a miracle-worker. He did not want people to follow him only because they thought he could be called upon simply to put bandages on the wounds of life. That's important for us to see because we often hold those same expectations of Jesus: miracle worker -- Mr. Fixit -- invisible protective shield. His immediate action to silence those demons could just as well be for our benefit, too, lest we cling to our unrealistic expectations.

We need to be clear that Jesus' purpose was to free us to enter into a new relationship with God. To persons whose lives were cluttered by every day cares, he proclaimed that all people are fashioned in God's image and are the jewel of God's creation. To persons who were struggling with life's trials, he proclaimed that God's love is the anchor that will allow them to stand against the dangers both from within and without!

In short, Jesus proclaims a relationship with God that pushes back our darkness -- that pushes back our secret fears -- and that frees us to walk boldly, knowing that every single day of our pilgrimage through life is worth the effort, despite all its dangers. That's the good news for us this morning! It is not to argue whether or not there are demons in this world. There are! It is to proclaim the kind of trust which believes that God's love for us is so great that life's demons and dangers never have the last word.

Rather than talking about what we expect from God, Jesus is telling us about what God wants from us, and that is a relationship with God that is based solely on trust. I am sometimes afraid that such an expectation is too simple for our scientific mindset. We have been taught to challenge everything. Childlike trust is too simplistic for a complex world. But that is where Jesus is leading us.

I want to tell you a story about a conversation between an African convert to Christianity and a missionary to his village. One day as the two men were walking through the jungles outside the village, the African was reflecting on the change in his life that had been brought about by his faith in Christ. "These jungles," he said, "are very dark. For most of my life, I have walked through them in fear of the demons that I was taught lived here. I no longer walk in fear on these paths. There may be demons or there may not be demons, but I am Christ's and that is enough!" <sup>1</sup>

We who have been Christians all our lives often take faith for granted. I know that I need to hear that African man's simple expression of trust. The reality is that we all have our jungles in life to walk through, whether they are covered with vines or paved with concrete. And there may or may not be demons on those paths. But we are Christ's, and that is enough!

Today's Gospel suggests a way to approach facing the trials of daily living. As simplistic as it may sound, it suggests that while we acknowledge and recognize the perils of life, our ultimate focus is not on them, but on Jesus! Mark does not provide the answer to the phenomena which he describes. He gives no blueprint as to what demon-possession is, nor does he give a series of steps we can take to avoid it. What he does do is shift our focus from the malady to the messiah!

Notice how Jesus quickly silenced the demons at about the time they started to identify him as the Son of God. I find that rather curious, to say the least. You'd think that Jesus would have welcomed such identification of his power and authority. Yet, when seen in light of Mark's entire Gospel, we discover that our God is a God of the broken, and our church is a fellowship of the needy. That's pretty much all it takes, as we'll see during this season-long sojourn with Mark, to be a member of Jesus' disciples then or now is the recognition of our deep need and trust that Jesus has come to meet it.

And so I invite you to think of those places of brokenness or disappointment or fear in your lives. God does not stay away from you because of these challenges or shortcomings but rather draws nearest to us precisely in these moments. Now, look outward at the brokenness we see and wonder if God might be choosing to work through us to draw that person to new life. God is still at work casting out the unclean spirits of the world, and God is using us to continue that work.

Jesus is not interested in academic acknowledgment of who he is. Jesus doesn't want us to speak about him purely from our knowledge. Jesus wants us to speak about him from a position of us accepting his Lordship. An

intellectual belief in Jesus is worthless. The issue is how much authority Jesus has in your life.

For those of you who like grammar, Martin Luther, the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer said that "The life of Christianity consists of possessive pronouns." We can say Christ is the Savior. We can say that Christ is Lord. We can say that Jesus is God. But can I say that Christ is *MY* Savior? Can I say that Christ is *MY* Lord? Can I say that Jesus is *MY* God?<sup>2</sup>

And so it is with us as a church here at Geist, that the Good News of Jesus will spread throughout our community as we engage in both word and deed. Jesus has power over demons. He cast demons out of the man at the synagogue and has power over all the demons of our lives also. Through word and sacrament, he brings that power to us and says to the demons in our life, "Be gone!" He says it as often as we need to hear it, over and over again, until by his power we are free from them all. But he can only do it when we proclaim "I Know Who You Are – The Holy One of God."

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<sup>1</sup> Story found in Sermons on the Gospel Readings, Series 1, Cycle B. Paul Flesner et. al. CSS Publishing Company, Lima, Ohio. 2002, page 60.

<sup>2</sup> Illustration found in Concordia Journal, Volume 29, Number 2, April, 2003.