

## Devotion Second Week After Pentecost 2021

**Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

We have begun a study of Mark's gospel this summer, looking at his ministry. This past Sunday I gave folks some background on this gospel – the oldest of the four. I mentioned that Mark writes this text like an action story – think of a movie script where the focus is on what happens, rather than what someone says. Jesus is always in a hurry, and everything happens “immediately.” I mentioned themes in this gospel, and I want to repeat them so that you have them available as we work through Jesus' ministry.

The main theme of Mark is that “God is here and God reigns.” Jesus' authority or power is set against the authority of Rome, and Jesus often crosses boundaries – what is acceptable versus what is not, human power versus God's power, and life versus death. And as we know from the reading Sunday, there are demons – a lot of demons.

In Mark 1:32-34, we read this: “That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.”

In Jesus' exorcism of the demon from the man in the synagogue earlier in Chapter 1, the demon said this: “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.”

Oh yeah, Jesus came to destroy the demons. And he is really, really good at it – so good that the next time he casts out demons the demons aren't even allowed to speak. They know who he is, even if the people don't yet. And they are afraid – and they should be afraid. They don't even get a chance to speak up or defend themselves. There is no defense. This is a cosmic battle that Jesus is fighting – the Lord of Light versus the Lord of Darkness. Think of “Star Wars” and Darth Vader and his minions versus “The Force.” I think George Lucas could have thought a little of Jesus casting out demons when he developed those themes of The Force versus The Dark Side.

The reality of this world is that there is a dark side – it consists of violence and uncontrolled rage and destruction. We discussed it in Sunday School – the worry about road rage when we're driving. On the way home from church on I-285, a car slid between me and a transfer truck on the right, trying to get in front of me when the car really had no room to do that. Jim and I recoiled in horror at an almost catastrophic accident. I don't know how the car missed broadsiding me, because it was maneuvering before I knew what was happening. God somehow protected us.

I don't know exactly why there is so much violence on our roads lately. One psychologist says it's because we get in our cars and think we're in a contained space that belongs solely to us, and we don't need to share that space with anyone else. And the space is de-humanized – it's a machine, not a human driving a machine. So we see anyone going faster than us, or switching lanes in front of us, or tailgating us, as the enemy that we must conquer in some fashion. We fabricate war zones out of a highway, and when we get angry at some slight related to the position of our car, we react in rage.

Our society has forgotten to “try a little tenderness,” as Otis Redding would sing. We've forgotten that those cars are filled with people, not racing automatons. And that when people are involved, we're all equally fragile. So I see demons as very real – I see them all around us in our society today. They may not have horns and a tail, but they're there, and they're dangerous. Matthew 6 tells us to quit worrying and to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness....” I think the key there is “righteousness” – we not only must live “rightly” but be an example to others of what “righteousness” looks like. One encounter at a time, we have to “do the right thing” and not get possessed by a demon of rage. We have to put a human face on the adversary and ask God to help us dial down the anger. God promises us that he will help us do that – and he has given us Jesus as an example. So I will pray for calm and safety on the road, and for voices that will intervene when disagreements get out of control. After all, Jesus is there to help exorcise those demons, if we just pray for his help and protection.

I hope this week is a peaceful one for you, and that no one cuts you off on the road. I hope this week is one where you take to heart the Matthew 6 text we studied in Sunday School – to not worry and trust in the Lord.

Jeanne