

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Mark 1: 21-28

“With Authority”

(01/29/2012)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God’s peace with you!

Let us read together the sermon text for this week. Like last Sunday you find the text in the New Testament section on page 35. It is again from the first chapter of Marks gospel. Let us read together the verses 21 – 28. It is the passage “The Man with an Unclean Spirit”.

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, ‘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.’ ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ ²⁶And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Let us first again collect some associations, which you got while reading and hearing this text. What ever comes into your mind is important. What resonates with you? Are there demons around at all? Is this not only an old nice exorcism story we can forget about in post-modern 2012? What do you think?

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This afternoon we will have at 2pm the last of our 5 Cluster Meetings. It is an interesting time in which we are called to hear God's message and love in this text.

The best way to learn about a religion is to look at the impacts it has and makes in a person's life. We can arrange our life in a way that religion forms only a limited part of it; it is then a well organized and administrated part of our existence. In this case religion doesn't hurt; but it also doesn't help much either – because it excludes major parts of our human soul and our public life. It is the religion of the scholarliness and isolation from real living experience. It seems that Jesus suffered most because of this kind of religion. Our gospels want to be gospels of healing - for our souls AND our societies. We human don't get along with the splitting of inside and outside, God and world, time and eternity. Who hinders us to be whole hinders us to live.

Some people see in a demon the devil, an external opponent. But this is not the meaning of a demon in the New Testament. A demon describes here the sickness of a soul: A man suffers, surrendered to

mental bondage. Such a person must literally feel like “obsessed”. For outsiders this person can appear as somebody, not capable for real contacts and relationships. The uncleanness can appear as a behavior, which looks for other people as “not kosher”. Like under duress he or she needs to play the role of the untouchable, the unsocial, a pariah [p^erei-a]. And the worse thing is: Such a person will feel him- or herself bad and degenerated [di-dschenerated].

In Depth Psychology we have learned how such conditions of a soul develop and how a human being stops to live himself – by revolving in always the same vicious circles of fear and self-hate, self-rejection and loneliness. It is our childhood, in which we all get formed. Sometimes a human cannot grow straight, so that he never can decide for himself. It is certainly possible to tell a child, that it cannot get something in the moment. But we can also prohibit a child to even have special feelings. In this last case the child will fear more and more these very natural feelings. First it fears the punishment of the parents. But with the time it will more and more demonize itself for these feelings. And from this moment on the demon will reign – with the automatic of soul destruction, and the mechanism of internal fear.

Finally you even don't know anymore, for which feelings you hate, demonize and avoid yourself; You only know that you are only worth to be hated and to be demonized. In Pablo Picasso's collection we find several drawings of Minotaurs [Minnetours] – this creature half-human & half-animal, hiding in a subterraneous labyrinth, a deadly danger for everybody, who gets too close to him. A person who

experiences himself this way, is rightly described in the New Testament as “unclean”.

The child bloomed as boy or girl, became sexual, became “unclean”, because dangerous, seductive. Or the child grew and wanted to start thinking him-/herself – and again this was interpreted as rebellious, dangerous, weird, threatening; with other words: sinful and demonic.

But the spirit of a human cannot be emptied. All the expelled and blocked feelings and experiences get deformed to thoughts, which don't go away. They all speak in their own languages, more and more senseless, more and more mechanic, more and more uninflected.

Only in front of this background we can understand, why this man in the synagogue of Capernaum cried out and is not able to one personal word. All his internal voices, this armada [armada] of forces and countervailing powers in him, let him yell at Jesus in collective form: “What have you done to US???” He Jesus, the Holy of God, should let him –or should I say- should let THEM alone, should not unsettle the unholy power in him; everything should stay like always. The well-known world of the demons is safer for him. What a horrible plea!! But did he have an alternative? For what else could he have asked for than the acknowledgement and approval of his life as collective? ...

It is in this story absolute critical, that Jesus does not accept any kind

of religion, which accepts or even brooks any kind of tranquillization for this inhumanity. In the synagogue of Capernaum, in this first public acting of Jesus, Jesus proofs his absolute “either –or”. From Jesus point of view it is not possible to leave people in the imprisonment of their fears – like a dressed animal in its captivity.

This is for us as Christians main reason for to be church: Who ever preaches the closeness of God’s kin-dom, cannot tolerate that people on earth need to live like in hell. Religion (we could also say “church”) is successful there, where people gain their freedom back, their beauty, their uniqueness. As heavy as the demoniac might protest – Jesus needs trying to break his resistance. And if the demoniac is not a person, but a social system, then we Christians are called to address the demons of this system and to drive them out.

What happens in the synagogue of Capernaum might be the work of several years. Years, in which a human is pulled back and forth – like described by Marc. Necessary for the healing is also the permanent shouting of the demoniac. Usually nobody wants to listen to cries of pain, the protest out of children days. – As not many want to hear the cries of the occupy movement, when they address the wrong development of our times. It seems for many people to be much smarter to keep the eyes shut. Or even better: To choke the other person’s mouth and to close the well of the own heart.

It is for Jesus the first time, appearing in the public, but from now on he will call exactly in this absolute, courageous way for a decision-

making. It is the first time that the human reality gets changed by talking about God.

Nothing is more wonderful than to see how a human is able to take the first chance he or she gets in his or her life. Our soul might be overwhelmed as much as possible – a single sound of a bell will call for freedom. This single bell-sound resonates with the language of our being with which God has called us with our name, when she created us as individual personality, as treasure, unique in this world.

“What is this?”, ask the people in the synagogue of Capernaum. For the gospel of Mark is means nothing else than that with this healing of the man with the unclean spirit a new time has started. We need to choose between God, who wants us as people -and the power of fear, which forces us to talk in ideological, collective terms. To be clear and again: Not only the economy, also our church has to serve us as God’s children. Not the opposite around!

With this healing miracle at the synagogue of Capernaum a new time has started. The religion, based on fear has been replaced by a religion of trust and identity. But it still requires our decidedness to ban the power of our old fears.

Please allow me a last thought -- a thought which gets us from our individual and social fears to the situation we are in as church, seeking for a new vision, allowing us as Christians to find new meaning for ourselves in this world in 2012.

We can refer for this purpose again to our text. The scribes are here the first time for Jesus the clear opponents and they will remain as those through the whole Mark-gospel. The scribes seem to be the natural enemies of Jesus. ... and this not because of individual mistakes, but as professional group, as the only social class as its whole in the entire New Testament. But why?

Stimulated by a story of the Danish theologian Soeren Kierkegaard we could describe the reason with the help of the following story: A man meets in China a beautiful woman. Both fall in love with each other. All his life, he swears, will belong to her. He has to return home. After weeks he receives from her a letter. The young man doesn't understand the foreign Chinese characters and goes therefore to a translator. He decides to learn her language. Years pass in which he learns laborious her language. He receives a second letter from her. But he hesitates to answer. He wants to learn her language, the tender phrases even better. Again years pass. A phase of six years – the time you need to study theology, to become educated as a preacher. We meet him now as a master for Chinese lyrics, provided with the best marks and exams you can imagine. But his love from former days he has forgotten meanwhile. Asked in the trusting circle of friends “why” he has started once to study Chinese he will answer now: By coincidence.

The same happened for Jesus with the scribes, somebody, who was once a person in love, but became a scholar, who wanted to live, but

ended up as archivist, who learned because of love and forgot over it the love.

What would Jesus say to us, if he would enter now through these doors? What would he think about our church? Would he affirm that we are real followers of his message? Or would he observe that we are more interested in our own social life as church family and our own history with this church than in the need of people in the our near and far community? Which grade would Jesus give us for the understanding of his message, if he would look at us? Would we be willing to give this building away, if we could help therewith Jesus to fulfill his mission? If the removal of a few pews would allow us to share communion safe around a table without steps – would you do this or would a piece of wood be more important to you than human beings? What would happen, if Jesus would appear, telling us to leave this sanctuary behind and to follow him? Would you go with him or would you put this building first?

All organizations and institutions loose with the time the momentum, they had in their beginning. This is like a natural law. It is the danger for all churches and temples that their sanctuaries become with the time more and more the character of dusty museums, which their members only want to see get filled again. But a museum only shelters the past. Not the future. If we want to find the future, then we need to face first each other, sit together like the first Christians did over a meal, sharing our faith stories and asking ourselves, where Jesus might be, if he would be with us. Where this last week week do

you think, Jesus wandered around? Was he in the cold streets, looking for people, who need help, mentally, financially, emotionally, socially. Where do you think Jesus will be tomorrow and all the days next week? Where ever you think he will be we should follow him to exactly to these places. May the spirit of gentleness guide us on this way back to our original future.

AMEN!