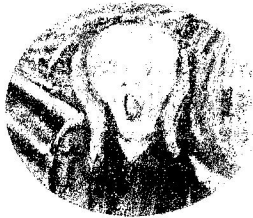


Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you're up to! You're the Holy One of God and you've come to destroy us! Jesus shut him up: "Quiet!" Get out of him!" The afflicting spirit threw the man into spasms, protesting loudly--and got out. Everyone there was incredulous, buzzing with curiosity. "what's going on here? A new teaching that does what it says?" He shuts up defiling, demonic spirits and sends them packing!" News of this traveled fast and was soon all over Galilee.



Edward Munch, *The Scream*, detail

"Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit"

Rev. Thomas Troeger

Silence, frenzied, unclean spirit cried God's healing Holy One
Cease your ranting! Flesh can't bear it; flee as night before the sun."
At Christ's words the demon trembled, from its victim madly rushed.
While the crowd that was assembled . . .

stood in wonder, stunned and hushed.

Lord, the demons still are thriving, in the gray cells of the mind;
Tyrant voices, shrill, and driving, twisted thoughts that grip and bind;
Doubts that stir the heart to panic, fears distorting reason's sight,
Guilt that makes our loving frantic, dreams that cloud the soul with fright.

Silence Lord, the unclean spirit in our mind and in our heart;
Speak your word that when we hear it, all our demons shall depart.
Clear our thought and calm our feeling; still the fractured, warring soul
While the crowd that was assembled . . . stood in wonder, true and whole.

"Getting on The Lord's Side"

Who is on the Lord's side? who will serve the King?
Who will be his helpers, other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side, who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side? who for him will go?
By thy call of mercy, by thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side, Savior, we are thine.

(Who Is on the Lord's Side? vs. 1)

The people in the synagogue were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he taught them as one who had authority. In a UCC Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, Rev. Copenhaver wrote: Does worship in your church include a prayer of confession? If so, it is probably near the beginning of the service. One reason for this placement is that God's presence reveals things to us. In God's clarifying Presence, we see things about our lives that we might not see otherwise. Some congregations no longer include a prayer of confession in their worship because the practice is considered too "negative." They contend that people have enough difficulties in their lives without the church adding to the burden. But confession is not about adding a burden. Quite the opposite. It is about being unburdened. Ultimately, there is no joy in denial. But there can be great joy in receiving forgiveness (adapted).

Not for weight of glory, not for crown and palm,
Enter we the army, raise the warrior psalm;
But for love that claimeth, lives for whom he died,
He whom Jesus nameth, must be on his side.
By thy love constraining, by thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side, Savior, we are thine.

(vs. 2)

When Jesus' voice of authority commanded: "Quiet! Get out of him!" and the tormenting spirit got out of the afflicted man, the people were incredulous, buzzing with curiosity, saying: Wow! A new teaching that does what it says!" Bottom line, the man was unburdened from the demonic spirits that disturbed him. Every demon that opposed goodness in creation, loving-kindness, and the merciful justice of God was disarmed and gone. "What's going on here?" the folks in the synagogue asked. Theologian Rita Brock commented: The image of Jesus as exorcist is someone who has experienced his own demons (Mark 1:12-13). The

temptation stories point to the image of a wounded healer, to an image of one who by his own experience understands vulnerability and internalized oppression. In having recovered their own hearts, healers have some understanding of the suffering of others. Naming the demons means knowing the demons . . . The gospels imply that anyone who exorcises cannot be a stranger to demons . . . to have faced our demons is never to forget their power to hurt and never to forget the power to heal that lies in touching broken-heartedness . . . Jesus hears, below the demon noises, an anguished cry for deliverance. Through . . . mutual touching . . . community is co-created as a continuing, liberating, redemptive reality (Imaging the Word, p.130).

Jesus, Thou hast bought us, not with gold or gem,
But with Thine own life-blood, for the diadem,
With thy blessing filling, each who comes to thee,
Thou has made us willing, thou hast made us free.
By thy grand redemption, by thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side, savior, we are thine.

(vs. 3)

So how do we as church in the Congregational Way, hear below the demon noises, with Jesus, to disarm and heal forces that oppose goodness in creation, loving-kindness, and the merciful justice of God? Or to put it another way, how in our community of faith, can the authoritative voice of Jesus that does what it says, be heard? In our church, we try to hear below our own disturbing ego voices, as we gather for worship, Bible study, prayer, and service to others. The way in which we order and govern ourselves is an important way too. Because we have neither pope nor bishops to tell us what to do and what to believe, we, the members of the congregation get to decide. In our church tradition, we do that in a democratic way with each member having equal voice and vote. But in order to keep that balance of power from tipping so much that Jesus' voice goes unheard, congregations set up rules of order and governance. For example, we have election of officers and committee members; we set term limits for committee members; we determine and fund our own budget; and, for some persons, they get voice but no vote. By doing this we level the playing

field so that we can better hear the authoritative voice of Jesus below our own, and get on his side rather than getting others on our own. Long ago, Jesus gave this promise to followers who shared in his mission: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' Explaining, Henri Nouwen said: 'the same Lord who binds us together in love will also reveal himself to us and others as we walk together on the road.' Each year as we rotate off one special area of ministry and move into another, we have an opportunity 'to rededicate ourselves to (as Martin Luther King, Jr. phrased it) the long and bitter---but beautiful---struggle for a new world.'

Fiercer be the conflict, strong may be the foe,
But the king's own army, none can overthrow.
Round his standard ranging; victory is secure,
For his truth unchanging, makes the triumph sure.
Joyfully enlisting by thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side, savior, we are thine.

(vs4)

A wisdom story is told about 'a woman who lived in a little, central-European village. She was a nurse and had devoted her life to caring for her neighbors. She was there at birth and at death, she bound up scratches, viruses, and broken bones, as well as sat through interminable nights with those who were seriously ill. In the course of time, she died. She had no family and so the villagers decided to hold a very lovely funeral for her. But the village priest had to remind them that she could not be buried in the cemetery for the town was Roman Catholic and the woman had been a Protestant. The villagers protested, but the priest held firm. It was not easy for him, because he too had been nursed by her. Nevertheless, the canons of the church were very clear; she would have to be buried outside of the fence. The day of the funeral arrived, and the whole village accompanied her casket to the cemetery, where she was buried---outside the fence. That night, after dark, a group of the villagers went back and moved the fence. (from Road Signs on the Way to Fishing by Mark Henry Miller, p. 27). Dear Lord, thank you for the struggles and joys of getting on your side. Amen.