

## COME OUT OF HIM!

Mark 1:21-28

“Why did I do that?” In our family Bible class we hear from many experts that we should not bring up old issues in our arguments with our spouse. We end up like the politicians who sling mud at each other. Yet I find myself doing that with my wife. Why?

I don't know about you, but I have problems in my mind. The Iowa State University counseling services and the Dean of Students office report that there are more cases than ever of students seeking emotional help. The tough economic situation in recent years is blamed for part of that. However, there are more young people coming to college who have psychological problems.

According to an article in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, we can see many parallels between problems in young people and in the characters from Winnie the Pooh. Pooh suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHA) and can be prone to Tourette's Syndrome. Also in his constant search for honey, he exhibits Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Eeyore suffers from chronic depression. Piglet has generalized anxiety disorder. His symptoms include anxiety, blushing, and stammering. Owl pretends to read, but he cannot. He tries to cover up spelling mistakes and language errors, which is clear proof that he is dyslexic. Rabbit has a narcissistic disorder. Christopher Robin is in the midst of a gender-identity crisis and spends too much time talking to animals. The only one that doesn't seem to have a problem is the irrepressible Tigger.

The study showed that intervention could help. Pooh could be put on a dose of Ritalin. Eeyore should be on Prozac. Therapy could help him deal with his problem of an amputated tail. Owl could get expert therapist to overcome his dyslexia. Active intervention is needed for Christopher Robin. It might not be too late for poor Piglet. He should have had intervention earlier with anti-panic drugs.

We may laugh at that, but the world is filled with neuroses, psychoses, and all kinds of other maladies. The answer to them, we are told, is to be satisfied with who you are and to have a good positive self-image. The medications and therapies can lead people away from those things that keep them from being what they can really be.

Is that what Jesus was really encountering in our Gospel lesson? They didn't know about things like ADHD or bipolar disorder or schizophrenia or chronic depression or obsessive compulsive disorder in Jesus' time. Was Jesus healing just in lieu of medicine, like when he healed people from infectious diseases like

leprosy? Was He just providing positive therapy to heal people? It isn't that His healings weren't miracles, but were those miracles just healing people from physical and mental problems?

Everyone is horrified by the Penn State scandal. It is not just something that was abhorrent. It was evil. But what was evil was not just the sexual assaults, but the attitude in a big college sports program that is so focused on that that it doesn't consider anything else. What about the evil that says that abortion is okay? Or the evil that makes us look the other way when someone is hurting? What about the evil that demands that I get something out of the person who injured me? What about the evil that makes me learn to hate a spouse or parents that makes me hurt most the people close to me?

We can explain away our problems as the result of a bad childhood or emotional disorders. That would be right where the devil would want us to be. The devil either works by convincing people that he is so powerful and fearful that they must obey him as people do in primitive societies when they try to appease the demons, or he works by convincing us that he doesn't exist. That way we look to medicine, psychology, and our own grit and determination to fight that evil. Then we become like someone caught in quicksand. The harder we struggle to get out of it, the worse we sink into it.

That is why Jesus didn't mess around with evil. He didn't apply a medication or educate the people to rise above it and explain it away intellectually. No, He faced evil head on and defeated it. “Be quiet!” He said to the demon. “Come out of him!” The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

Why could Jesus do that? He could because He had the authority to do that. Jesus is God. But He also was sent by the Father to face evil. God told Satan back in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve committed the first sin, “He (the descendant of Eve—Jesus) will crush your head.” That is why the demon said to Jesus, “I know who you are, the holy one of God.” The demon was not saying that simply to taunt Jesus. He was scared to death, because he knew that Jesus had come to crush him.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's classic Lord of the Rings saga Aragorn becomes the king. The elves give him a special sword, Anduvril. This sword gives him the authority to lead the army of the dead, the Dead Men of Dunharrow. Because of that authority, they obey him, as he uses them to turn defeat into victory.

Jesus had that authority over evil. His “Andivril,” His “sword,” is His Word by which He commanded the demons and they obeyed.

Two Texas Highway Patrol Officers were conducting speeding enforcement on Hwy 77, just south of Kingsville, TX. One of the officers was using a hand held radar device to check speeding vehicles approaching the town of Kingsville. The officers were suddenly surprised when the radar gun began reading 300 miles per hour and climbing. The officer attempted to reset the radar gun, but it would not reset and then it suddenly turned off. Just then a deafening roar over the Mesquite treetops on Hwy 77 revealed that the radar had in fact locked on to a USMC F/A-18 Hornet which was engaged in a low flying exercise near this, it's Naval Air home base location in Kingsville TX.

Back at the Texas Highway Patrol Headquarters in Corpus Christi, the Patrol Captain fired off a complaint to the US Naval Base Commander in Kingsville for shutting down his equipment. The reply came back in true USMC style:

Thank you for your letter....

You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the Hornet had detected the presence of, and subsequently locked on to, your hostile radar equipment and automatically sent a jamming signal back to it, which is why it shut down.

Furthermore, an Air-to-Ground missile aboard the fully armed aircraft had also automatically locked on to your equipment's location.

Fortunately, the Marine Pilot flying the Hornet recognized the situation for what it was, quickly responded to the missile system alert status and was able to override the automated defense system before the missile was launched to destroy the hostile radar position on the side of Hwy 77 So. of Kingsville.

The pilot suggests you cover your mouths when cussing at them, since the video systems on these jets are very high tech.

Sergeant Johnson, the officer holding the radar gun, should get his dentist to check his left rear molar. It appears the filling is loose. Also, the snap is broken on his holster.'

That's authority. That is the authority Jesus has. That is the power and authority we now have. In a Baptism the question is asked, “Do you renounce the devil?” Our recent hymnal went back to the early Christian tradition of asking that in three questions. “Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you renounce all his ways?” The idea is that in Baptism we call on the name of the Triune God—the God who has the authority to kick out the devil. When we confess our sins, we hear the words of Jesus Himself through the pastor as the called representative of the congregation telling us, “Your sins are forgiven.” And we have that authority given to us by Jesus to do that to one another. In all these ways Jesus is saying to evil, “Come out of him!” That authority— not medicine, not self-help strategies, not will power or determination— is what has the power over evil.

What is important for us is to not try to get around that evil by pretending it doesn't exist or pushing it off on someone else. To restate Oliver Hazard Perry's famous quote, “We have met the enemy and it is us.”

C. S. Lewis'd The Screwtape Letters contain the letters exchanged by a fictional apprentice demon, Wormwood, and his mentor, Screwtape. Screwtape writes from hell and gives direction to Wormwood about the person he is supposed to be tempting on earth. Screwtape urges Wormwood to convince the man that he is not all that bad. The better he thinks he is, the less he will depend on God and His forgiveness.

That is why Scriptures does show us about the demons and evil. They are very real. Then they can be confronted in an even more real way. We can take the evil in our lives, not hide it, but bring it to Jesus. He will exorcise it just as He did with that possessed man. For He has authority. He has the power to say to the evil in our lives. “Come out of him!”

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman

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