

Mark 1:21-28  
January 29, '12

**“ARE YOU POSSESSED?”**

ON MY FIRST VISIT TO NEW ORLEANS I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO TO CENTRAL GROCERY AND EXPERIENCE, FIRS<sup>T</sup>HAND, WHAT I HAD ALWAYS BEEN TOLD WAS THE GREATEST SANDWICH IN THE WORLD – A MUFFALETTA.

I HAVE TO AGREE. IT'S MY FAVORITE SANDWICH.

I SUPPOSE MOST OF US HAVE A SANDWICH THAT WE WOULD SAY IS OUR FAVORITE.

THE THING ABOUT A SANDWICH IS THAT THEY'RE ALL BASICALLY THE SAME IN TERMS OF THEIR STRUCTURE.

YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING ON THE TOP THAT'S THE SAME AS SOMETHING ON THE BOTTOM WITH SOMETHING DIFFERENT – THE REAL “MEAT” OF THE SANDWICH (SO TO SPEAK) – IN THE MIDDLE.

I TELL YOU THAT BECAUSE WHAT WE'VE JUST READ IS A SANDWICH OF SORTS – AT LEAST IN TERMS OF ITS STRUCTURE.

IT'S KNOWN AS A “MARK SANDWICH” AND THERE ARE SEVERAL OF THEM THAT ARE FOUND IN MARK'S GOSPEL.

YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING AT THE TOP THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE SAME AS WHAT YOU'VE GOT ON THE BOTTOM & THEN THERE'S “THE MEAT” RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE.

LIKE ANY SANDWICH, THOUGH, THIS “MARK SANDWICH” HAS TO HAVE BOTH THE TOP & THE BOTTOM TO HOLD IT ALL TOGETHER PROPERLY.

HERE WE GO AGAIN WITH THE RAPIDITY OF MARK'S GOSPEL.

IN THE FIRST CHAPTER ALONE – IN JUST THE FIRST 28 VERSES – WE HAVE THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS, THE ARREST OF JOHN, THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES, AND THIS FIRST EPISODE OF TEACHING & HEALING IN THE TEMPLE IN CAPERNAUM.

THAT'S 6 SCENES IN JUST 28 SENTENCES!

MATTHEW & LUKE TAKE ALMOST 5 CHAPTERS EACH TO GET US TO THIS POINT IN THE STORY!

AND THERE'S ALSO THAT WORD “IMMEDIATELY” THAT KEEPS SHOWING UP.

WE SEE IT IN THE FIRST VERSE WE JUST READ, WE SEE IT IN THE LAST VERSE & WE SEE IT RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS “MARK SANDWICH.”

AND BACK TO THAT SANDWICH WE GO.

ON THE TOP – AT THE BEGINNING – WE HAVE PEOPLE MARVELING AT THE AUTHORITY OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN CAPERNAUM.

IN THE MIDDLE, WE SEE HIM CASTING OUT AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT FROM A MAN IN THE CROWD.

AND THEN, AT THE BOTTOM, WE FIND THE PEOPLE AGAIN AMAZED AT THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IN BEING ABLE TO CAST OUT THE SPIRIT WITH MERELY A WORD.

LET'S BEGIN BY LOOKING AT THE MEAT OF THE SANDWICH – THE CONTENTS IN THE MIDDLE.

THERE IS ALWAYS A QUESTION AS TO WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON – IN THIS INCIDENT & IN ANY NUMBER OF INCIDENTS IN THE GOSPELS WHERE WE FIND JESUS CASTING OUT DEMONS OR SPIRITS FROM SOMEONE WHO IS POSSESSED.

WAS IT REALLY AN EVIL SPIRIT – A DEMON – OR WAS IT SIMPLY SOME SORT OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL OR SPIRITUAL MALADY THAT WAS AFFLICTING THIS MAN?

WAS IT SOMETHING THAT MODERN MEDICINE OR PSYCHOTHERAPY COULD HAVE ADDRESSED?

THE REASON THE QUESTION IS STILL ASKED IS BECAUSE WE SIMPLY DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO IT – AND PROBABLY NEVER WILL.

I THINK WE ALL KNOW, THOUGH, THAT THERE REALLY ARE DEMONS THAT LURK ALL ABOUT US & ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE US.

THERE WAS A NEW YORKER CARTOON THAT DEPICTED A MAN LEAVING FOR WORK ONE MORNING, HOLDING A LIQUOR BOTTLE ALONG WITH HIS BRIEFCASE.

HE SAID TO HIS WIFE, *“IT’S TAKE YOUR INNER DEMONS TO WORK DAY.”*

YES, WE KNOW THAT SOME OF THE THINGS THAT TRY TO CAPTURE US & CONTROL US – MANY OF THE THINGS THAT LONG TO POSSESS US - REALLY ARE DEMONIC & DESTRUCTIVE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE THINGS THAT MODERN MEDICINE CAN CURE.

I’LL NEVER FORGET AN EXPERIENCE I HAD A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO WITH AN ADOLESCENT BOY WHO WAS SUFFERING FROM REYE’S SYNDROME.

I THINK HE MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE FIRST DIAGNOSED CASES, BEFORE THE LINK WAS MADE BETWEEN THIS HORRENDOUS & DEADLY AFFLICTION AND THE TAKING OF ASPIRIN BY CHILDREN.

TIMMY WAS, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, ONE OF THE FINEST YOUNG MEN YOU’D EVER MEET.

HE WAS QUIET, SOFT-SPOKEN, INTELLIGENT, KIND & OBEDIENT.

TO THIS DAY, I WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO THINK OF A FINER YOUNG MAN.

ONE DAY, THOUGH, A SEEMINGLY COMMON ILLNESS WITH TIMMY TURNED UGLY & HE HAD TO BE LIFE-FLIGHTED TO A HOSPITAL 50 MILES AWAY BECAUSE THE DOCTORS SUSPECTED REYE’S SYNDROME.

EMMA SUE & I WERE THERE AT THE HOSPITAL WITH HIS PARENTS AND NONE OF US COULD GO TO WHERE THEY WERE KEEPING HIM.

WE COULD HEAR HIM, THOUGH, AND FOR 12 OF THE MOST EXCRUCIATING HOURS I’VE EVER SPENT, WE HEARD SOUNDS COMING FROM THE FAR END OF THE HOSPITAL CORRIDOR THAT I HOPE TO NEVER HEAR AGAIN.

THERE WAS SCREAMING & SHRIEKING THAT ONE WOULD SWEAR COULDN’T POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN MADE BY A HUMAN BEING, BUT RATHER A WILD ANIMAL.

THE GROTESQUELY FOUL LANGUAGE INTERMITTENT WITH THOSE SCREAMS COULDN’T POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN TIMMY, BUT IT WAS.

THE DOCTORS SAID IT WAS GOING TO GO ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

TIMMY WOULD EITHER BE DEAD IN 24 HOURS OR ON HIS WAY HOME.

FORTUNATELY, IT WAS THE LATTER & THE NEXT DAY HE WAS BACK IN SCHOOL WITH NO LATER SIDE EFFECTS.

IN ANOTHER TIME & ANOTHER PLACE, WHAT TIMMY EXPERIENCED SURELY COULD HAVE BEEN CLASSIFIED AS “DEMON POSSESSION.”

BUT IN REALITY, IT TOOK A COMBINATION OF PRAYER & MODERN MEDICINE TO EASE THE SWELLING ON HIS BRAIN & ENABLE HIM TO SURVIVE.

THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT POSSESSED HIS MIND & HIS BRAIN & HE WAS DELIVERED FROM IT – ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.

BUT I THINK OF OTHERS WHOSE MIND ISN'T WORKING AS PERHAPS WE THINK IT SHOULD WHO AREN'T DELIVERED FROM THEIR AFFLICTION.

I THINK OF ANOTHER YOUNG MAN NAMED PATRICK.

HE WAS IN HIS MID TO LATE 20'S AND HE STARTED ATTENDING A CHURCH I WAS SERVING.

HE LIVED IN A NEARBY GROUP HOME & WOULD ALWAYS BRING HIS STUFFED LION TO WORSHIP WITH HIM.

DURING THE SERVICE, YOU MIGHT OCCASIONALLY HEAR THE LION LET OUT A LITTLE ROAR THAT SOUNDED REMARKABLY LIKE PATRICK.

PATRICK DIDN'T SEEM TO BE LONELY BECAUSE HE FREQUENTLY TOLD ME ABOUT HIS FRIENDS – BOB, PETE & AL.

APPARENTLY, THEY LIVED AT THE GROUP HOME WITH PATRICK & HE SAID THEY HAD A GREAT TIME TOGETHER, TALKING, READING & PLAYING GAMES.

ONE DAY, I STOPPED IN TO VISIT PATRICK & THE PERSON IN CHARGE HAD ME WAIT IN THE LIVING ROOM OF THE HOUSE WHILE HE CALLED PATRICK TO THE FRONT.

HE WAS DELIGHTED TO SEE ME & INVITED ME TO COME BACK TO HIS ROOM TO MEET BOB, PETE & AL.

HE SAID THEY WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF A GAME.

I WALKED INTO HIS ROOM & THERE, ON HIS BED, WAS A “CHUTES & LADDERS” GAME ALL SET UP.

SITTING ON THE THREE SIDES OF THE GAME BOARD – WITH THE 4<sup>TH</sup> SPOT RESERVED FOR PATRICK - WERE 3 STUFFED ANIMALS – BOB, PETE & AL.

I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT IT BROKE MY HEART TO SEE THE REALITY OF WHO PATRICK'S “FRIENDS” WERE.

BUT I ALSO THEN THOUGHT OF HOW THANKFUL I WAS THAT PATRICK HAD FELT COMFORTABLE COMING TO OUR CHURCH.

PATRICK WASN'T LIKE TIMMY.

HE WASN'T GOING TO BE “IMMEDIATELY” – OR EVER – DELIVERED FROM WHAT IT WAS THAT AFFLICTED HIS MIND.

BUT, STILL, HE WAS DRAWN TO THE CHURCH.

WHY? WHY DID HE WANT TO GO THERE?

I THINK IT WAS BECAUSE HE FELT HE COULD ENTER THOSE DOORS & BECOME A PART OF A CHURCH FAMILY.

HE FELT THAT HE WOULD BE MET WITH UNDERSTANDING, LOVE & ACCEPTANCE.

I THINK THIS IS WHERE WE HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE OTHER PARTS OF THE SANDWICH – THE BREAD – THAT WHICH IS FOUND ON THE TOP & THE BOTTOM, OR, IN THE CASE OF THIS “MARK SANDWICH,” THAT WHICH IS FOUND AT THE BEGINNING & THE END.

IT’S THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS THAT ASTOUNDS THE PEOPLE IN THE TEMPLE.

THEY ARE INITIALLY ASTOUNDED AT THE AUTHORITY OF HIS TEACHINGS & LATER THEY ARE ASTOUNDED AT HIS POWER TO BE ABLE TO RELEASE THIS MAN FROM HIS CAPTIVITY TO EVIL WITH A SINGLE COMMAND.

WE’VE BEEN TALKING FOR SEVERAL WEEKS NOW ABOUT THE CALL OF GOD IN OUR LIVES.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE SONG OF BOB DYLAN DURING A TIME OF SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE – “...IT MAY BE THE DEVIL OR IT MAY BE THE LORD, BUT YOU’RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY.”

THE QUESTION TODAY’S MESSAGE ASKS IS, “ARE YOU POSSESSED?”

DYLAN’S WORDS SUGGEST THAT IT MIGHT BE MORE APPROPRIATELY STATED LIKE THIS – “BY WHOM ARE YOU POSSESSED?” OR “BY WHAT ARE YOU POSSESSED?”

YOU & I ARE GOING TO BE POSSESSED BY SOMETHING.

WHAT’S IT GOING TO BE?

IS IT GOING TO BE THE EVIL SPIRITS THAT TRY TO GRAB HOLD OF YOUR HEART, YOUR MIND, YOUR SOUL, YOUR BODY & DICTATE WHO YOU ARE & WHAT YOU DO?

OR IS IT GOING TO BE JESUS CHRIST?

I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE WITHIN THE CHURCH ARE RELUCTANT TO ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE POSSESSED BY JESUS.

THEY’RE RELUCTANT BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT HE ASKS HARD QUESTIONS, HE MAKES GREAT DEMANDS & HE ISSUES FORMIDABLE CHALLENGES.

HE ASKS US TO LEAVE EVERYTHING ELSE BEHIND & FOLLOW HIM.

HE DEMANDS THAT WE SET ASIDE OUR SELFISH & SELF-SERVING LIFESTYLE & LIVE SACRIFICIALLY FOR OTHERS.

HE ISSUES THE FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE TO ACCEPT THE “PATRICKS” OF THIS WORLD, NOT ONLY INTO THE CHURCH, BUT INTO OUR LIVES AS WELL.

YOU SEE, IF YOU DON’T THINK YOU HAVE TO SERVE JESUS, YOU CAN SATISFY YOURSELF WITH A RELIGIOUS SMORGASBORD!

YOU TAKE A LITTLE BIT OF THIS & A LITTLE BIT OF THAT.

YOU MIGHT EVEN PICK UP A SANDWICH ALONG THE WAY – BUT IT CERTAINLY WON'T BE A “MARK SANDWICH,” ROOTED AS IT IS – ON THE TOP & ON THE BOTTOM – IN THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS.

YOU SEE, WHEN YOU GO LOOKING FOR A RELIGIOUS SMORGASBORD, YOU END UP WITH A HODGE-PODGE OF NOTHING.

AND YET YOU'RE STILL POSSESSED.

YOU'RE POSSESSED BY YOUR OWN MAKE-BELIEVE FAITH WITH YOU AS ITS ULTIMATE AUTHORITY & THE ONE YOU END UP SERVING IS YOURSELF.

THE QUESTIONS, THE DEMANDS & THE CHALLENGES OF JESUS ARE THE ONLY WAY TO FIND TRUE FULFILLMENT IN LIFE BECAUSE THE GOD WHO CREATED US, CREATED US TO BE POSSESSED BY THOSE QUESTIONS, THOSE DEMANDS & THOSE CHALLENGES.

WHEN WE SUBMIT TO THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS, WHEN WE TRUST HIS TEACHINGS & WHEN WE LOOK TO HIM FOR DIRECTION, WE OPEN OURSELVES UP TO A BRAND NEW WORLD OF EXCITING POSSIBILITIES.

WE WERE CREATED TO LOVE, WE WERE CREATED TO SERVE, WE WERE CREATED FOR COMPASSIONATE LIVING & SACRIFICIAL GIVING.

WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES AMAZED AT THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST'S TEACHING, WHEN WE SEE THE POWER HE HAS OVER THE EVIL SPIRITS THAT THREATEN OUR LIVES & WHEN WE SUBMIT TO HIS AUTHORITY OVER EVERYTHING WE SAY & EVERYTHING WE DO – WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES POSSESSED BY JESUS HIMSELF, WE'VE CHOSEN A “MARK SANDWICH” & THAT, I WOULD SUGGEST, IS *REALLY* THE GREATEST SANDWICH IN THE WORLD. AMEN.

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