

**SERMON**  
**By: Gail Fricker**

**Who's the Boss?**

**January 28, 2018**

**Scripture Reading: *Mark 1:21-28***

**(Story tell the scripture – adapted from [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org))**

Were you at the synagogue in Capernaum today? I wasn't sure I saw you and so I will tell you as clearly as I can what happened. I can only explain that something occurred that has never, yes, never ever happened before in our hometown synagogue where our people "gather together." What took place is unlike anything our rabbis have instructed us in over the years. This was far beyond their teaching and authority.

Worship started out like a routine, very normal gathering. We all came with the usual expectation. Now don't get me wrong, our rabbis are faithful interpreters of the Torah as they instruct us in the Word of the Lord, but their teaching does get to be routine. Everything was progressing as usual, the prayers, the Psalms, the reading of the Torah, when a newcomer "*immediately*" entered the synagogue and began teaching and instructing us, dare I say, with a new "*authority*". His authority was not as our scribes. It was different from the traditions.

I am still in shock as to what happened next. "*Immediately*" a deranged person comes in the synagogue and starts to scream out. No one in the synagogue had a clue as to what brought forth this outburst. It appears an unclean spirit in the man had identified this new teacher as one who had *authority to exorcize* and called out to him by name: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" The voice was a shrill demonic-like scream. How did this spirit know the name of the rabbi from Nazareth? Did the voice really assume that this teacher has the *authority to exorcize* demonic or unclean spirits?

The scream continued with words of blasphemy using the name of God: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." With this a hushed silence came over the entire synagogue as these words were spoken. The rabbi named Jesus from the hill country of Nazareth sensed the offense of these words, the identity of the Holy One of God. Then he spoke to the possessed man and rebuked him with exorcizing words which likewise silenced the entire synagogue, "Be silent, and come out of him."

What occurred next was a demonstration I have never, ever, witnessed before. The man began writhing on the floor like he was in conflict with the spirits possessing him. Then the voice of a demonic spirit cried out with the same shrill demonic-like scream. The unclean spirit came out of him and then silence. The man appeared to be calm. He stood up and in his right mind looked as normal as any of us.

Needless to say we were all overcome and amazed and kept saying to one another, "What is this? A new teaching -- with *authority he exorcizes* a demon possessed person!" What took place we saw with our own eyes. Even the unclean spirits obeyed this teacher. On my oath this is what took place at synagogue today. We have no other experience like this to compare. I've since heard that what took place in our synagogue "*immediately*" spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. I tell you, this Rabbi somehow has the authority of God.

To be honest, don't you find stories of exorcism the hardest to relate to? Miracle stories are hard enough to understand in our scientific age, but at least we have the experience of longing for healing, or a desire to feed the hungry. But demon possession? It is just simply beyond the experience and imagination of most of us.

The closest I can get to it is a memory of my brother who believed he had snakes in his bed! As a child I would wake up most mornings to find him asleep in the upstairs landing – he had taken all his blankets and sheets off his bed, and made himself a bed on the landing in the middle of the night so that the snakes under his bed couldn't get him. I remember my mother telling him, time and time again, in a very authoritative voice, that there were no snakes or monsters under the bed – but for at least a year my brother just didn't believe her. His nightmares had control of him. He didn't have a dream catcher!

But the story that we heard is not really just about demons, or snakes, or even just a miracle story – the real subject is Jesus' authority in word and deed. When Jesus arrived in the synagogue and started to teach, the reaction of the people around was amazement. This new teacher was different because

*“he taught them as one who had authority” (v 22)*

The people gathered at the synagogue would have been used to listening to the scribes and Pharisees teach. It was probably the same each week. They would hear about adherence to tradition, and interpretation of the Jewish scriptures. But Jesus taught in a much freer way. The word 'authority' comes from the Greek word 'exesti', which translated actually means 'it is free'. So when Mark tells us that the people were amazed at Jesus' *authority* – it means that they were literally amazed at the freedom of his teachings. They doubtless wondered where Jesus' authority came from since he was not a teacher of the law. I am sure that the learned scribes were listening very carefully to every word that Jesus said, also wondering with what authority he was speaking. It must have shaken them up even more when the tormented man that came into the synagogue; he was on the brink of sanity, but he knew exactly who Jesus was. He knew Jesus spoke with the authority of God, and he shouted out:

*“I know who you are – the Holy One of God!” (v24)*

And Jesus' reaction was again to speak and act with authority. He commanded the spirit to

*“Be quiet! And Come Out” (v25)*

We know the rest of the story – how the man shrieked, then fell silent and calm. It must have been very awe inspiring for all who saw it – and Mark's account tells again that the people were amazed. They were amazed not just because of the healing of the tormented man, but because Jesus acted with authority. “He gave orders to evil spirits and they obeyed” – The people began to talk about this authority throughout Galilee. It is the same authority that Jesus spoke with to the demon possessed man on the hillside. The same authority that he spoke with during the storm at sea when he commanded the waves to “Be quiet, Be Still”.

But what does this story of a demonic man mean to us? In mean, let's face it, we don't talk about demons very much today – at least not in the United Church. But Jesus' action of healing the sick man was a demonstration of Jesus' authority over evil, in whatever form it may be. We know from Jesus' teachings that he does not want anything to keep us from all that God hopes and intends for us. I have never thought of myself as demon possessed, but I know that on occasions I have allowed other things to have control over me, like anger at a colleague or a family member – and that anger has led me to say and do things that I regret. At those times, I know that anger has kept me from God.

Think of the 'demon' as a metaphor for anything that has a hold on you; as something that stops you from being blessed by the Spirit of God, and from being a blessing to others. Perhaps it is jealousy or envy that has caused you to say an unkind word about someone. Perhaps events and emotions control us in ways that we do not want.

For others, the experience of possession is even greater and more damaging as they have felt the addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography. And some 'unclean spirits' may be more society- approved, such as work-a-holism, affluence, or greed. I am sure that each of us in our hearts can think of something that sometimes has authority over us, something that keeps us from being close in our relationship to God. Take a moment to think about it. (pause

Jesus has the authority to stop things having control over us. The authority to cleanse us. It may not be as dramatic as the man in the synagogue with convulsions and loud cries, although there are stories of sudden encounters with grace and mercy, and miraculous healings. But sometimes the road to healing takes more time. Sometimes it takes the steady support of a grief network, an AA group, a parenting group, anger management classes, family counselling, or whatever. God is at work in all these ways, and so many more, to free us from the "unclean spirits" that control us.

And so, we come back to the message of authority again. I am reminded of a story that a friend told me. A Boss was concerned that his employees were not giving him enough respect, so he tried an old fashioned method of persuasion: He brought a sign into work that said "Warning, I am the Boss" (show sign) and he taped it to his door. After lunch, he noticed that someone had taped another sign over his that read: "You're wife called; she wants her sign back!" (Show sign)

Joking aside, God does want to be the Boss of our lives. Not in a mean spirited demanding way, but in a caring and loving way. God wants us to hand over the reins, so that the Spirit can step in and heal us. God wants to be our "dream catcher". We just need to allow God to have control. Be assured, that if God can control the winds and the seas, God can command anything that is noisy in our lives to "Be Quiet!" God does not want our demons, or our nightmares, to have control of us. God does not want anything to stand in the way of a relationship with God. So, as you leave here today, make a promise to yourself, that you will allow God to have authority, and let God be the boss.