

Sermon 201801218 Epiphany 4B

A few years ago I was at the Tennessee State Capital....

... for a meeting with a couple of State Legislators.

I had gotten there early enough....

... that I went to the nearby cafeteria...

...to wait for my appointment time.

While I was there....

...I noticed a table of several elected officials....

...having a meal together and talking.

These were some of the people I had been in conversation with...

...over the years of my advocating for healthcare...

...for the poor and working poor.

I will admit, first, I looked at them sitting at that table....

...with a bit of troublesome “scorn”

...because they could not see things the way I saw it.

I sat and looked at them and reflected:

“What are you here to do?”

What is important to you...

...BEYOND your political philosophy?

And then...

...as I sat reflecting....

...it must have been the Holy Spirit....

...reminding me of motivational speaker....

...Zig Ziglar’s saying:

... *“When you are pointing a finger at someone....*

....there are four fingers pointing back at you!”

So that got me wondering...

...what shaped my own calls and causes in the world...

...and I decided I had to ask myself the same
question...

...that I was silently asking that table of
politicians:

“What is your hope for the world?”

“What is YOUR hope for THE WORLD, Matt Steinhauer?”

There are lots of Christians....

...who would answer that question:

“That everybody be saved” ...

...“That everybody become a Christian.”

In today's gospel reading...

...we hear the VERY FIRST public act of Jesus...

...according to Mark.

Jesus teaches.

Unlike all the **other** teachers....

*... those who gather in the Synagogue have heard
teach....*

...Jesus teaches with AUTHORITY.

The listeners in the synagogue...

...may not grasp where this authority comes from...

...but the unclean spirit recognizes...

...where this authority comes from

IMMEDIATELY!

"I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

It might seem strange to us...

...that Jesus' first act in Mark...

...is an EXORCISM.

Do we even believe in exorcisms?

Aren't these ancient stories of demon possession....

...really just examples of...

...physical, psychological, or mental illness?

Mark's first story of Jesus ministering to someone...

...is not about Jesus saving their soul.

It is about Jesus FREEING someone...

...from the shackles of an unclean spirit.

What is God's hope for the world?

Maybe if we pay closer attention to our Bible reading...

...we can see that "*paying for our sins*"...

...Is not ALL that Jesus came to do.

Jesus heals the sick...

...he sets the prisoner free.

While we may struggle believing in DEMON POSSESSION...

...there are some people who are truly **possessed**...

... by challenges that they have no control over:

- Alcohol and Chemical addiction,
- pornography,
- gambling
- eating disorders

...the list goes on....

...consumed and possessed....

... by things where **the harder they try** to stop....

...the stronger the pull...

... to engage in those destructive activities
becomes.

“No Pastor...I don’t have addictions....

...I’m OK in that area.”

But we may STILL indeed be possessed.

Have you ever been possessed by worry?

Have you ever been possessed by fear?

- or doubt?
- or disappointment?
- or jealousy?

Have you ever been possessed by the need to get even?

Have you ever been possessed....

... by the need to win the argument,

...or have the last word?

I think Mark throws this miracle out there FIRST...

... because Mark wants us to know that...

.... high on the agenda....

.... of the One who comes to give us life...

.... is the means to help cast out....

.... those things that **possess us**,

.... and that are LIFE TAKING.

Our God is a **life-giving** God.

God's hope for the world is that we have abundant life.

God is revealed through Jesus Christ....

.... in Jesus' work to give life....

.... to those who are dead in sin.

Jesus comes to drive out those things...

... that take life from us.

It may not be as dramatic for the man or woman....

... that Jesus finds in the church....

... as it was for the man...

... Jesus found in the synagogue.

The “casting out” may be a process....

....and may take time...

...and may take professional and medical help.

It may take being involved....

... in a community of imperfect people....

.... who gather to love and accept one another...

...and not to judge.

In the first letter of John....

...we hear *“perfect love casts out fear!”*

Perfect love is none other than Jesus Christ....

...who **casts out**....

...*(performs an EXORCISM)*...

...on “fear”...

... and **anything else** that possess us!

+++++++

Think about the Words of Institution....

... during Holy Communion:

“This is my body...given...FOR YOU!”

Think about these words from the Nicene creed:

*...“Who FOR US and for OUR SALVATION Came
down...”*

Came down to cast out the demons large and small...

...quiet and loud...

...hidden and obvious....

...that we seem to be under the control of.

But Jesus teaches with authority.

Jesus heals with his very presence.

Jesus saves with his love!

In what Jesus does in his every act....

...is a picture of God's hope for the world.

As followers of Christ...

...we are called to bear witness to that hope....

...by not only receiving and stewarding...

... the gifts of life **WE** are given....

...but being sure every person created in God's image....

...is aware they have received those same gifts of life...

...and accompanying them into experiencing...

...the benefits of those gifts.

When that happens...

...it will mean OUR hope for the world....

...is in line with God's hope for the world!

Amen