

The world of Mark's Gospel is one of clear and precise boundaries. In Mark's Gospel world there were clear and precise boundaries of ritual purity which were extremely important with rules separating clean from unclean highly developed.

Jesus with his clear and precise boundaries ignores these cultural proscriptions, exercising his divine power. As he uses his authority, he frees not only the 'crazy' man, he frees all those around him as well. Everyone in this story has been given their freedom to be in relationship to each other in a new, life-giving way.

As we walk Mark's Gospel we will find our normal defences stripped away.

We will be forced to confront our demons. However, we do not do this on our own.

We never do this on our own. The Risen Christ neither prevents nor hinders us from making the journey that is ours, he simply comes along with us. He accompanies us to free us, to restore us to right relationship with ourselves, our communities, and with God. We need not fear to confront whatever demons which may hold us captive from each other and from our own selves.

According to Mark's account, the man was held captive by an unclean spirit, had no voice of his own - the spirit spoke for him.

He had no control over his body - the spirit convulsed him.

He had no community - the spirit isolated him.

And the man had no dignity - the spirit dehumanised him.

Just as our unclean spirits can silence us, control and isolate us and can take our dignity from us.

In Mark's story, the unclean spirit goes to the synagogue and listens to Jesus. The unclean spirit recognises 'the Holy One of God' before anyone else does. It calculates the risk, realises that Jesus's presence signals its doom, and puts up a loud, vicious fight before it surrenders.

Sometimes our 'unclean spirits' take up residence in our holy places. We, like the man with the unclean spirit of the Gospel, carry our destructive habits and tendencies into our churches, our friendships, our families, and our workplaces. Sometimes our demons - our fears, our addictions, our sins, and our compulsions - recognise Jesus first because they know that an encounter with him will change everything.

So, they make us recoil - wince, withdraw and attack - as soon as Jesus shows up in the guise of a loving friend, or a provocative sermon, or an unsettled conscience.

Mark never tells us what Jesus taught his audience that day. All we know is that he entered the synagogue, taught with an authority his listeners found astonishing, and underscored that authority with an exorcism that shocked everyone who witnessed it.

Jesus didn't use his authority to self-promote or to accrue power.

He used his authority only to heal, to free, to serve, and to empower those around him.

Maybe this is precisely why those gathered at the synagogue that day found him so compelling.

Jesus had no political power and sought none.  
Had no earthly throne and sought none.  
He had an integrity and a generosity that compelled people to listen and to follow him.

And on this day in the synagogue, and every day, Jesus stepped directly into the pain, rage, ugliness, and horror at the heart of this story. At the heart of our story.  
His brand of holiness does not require Jesus to keep his distance or his hands clean.  
He is in the fear, in the sickness, in the nightmare, ready to engage anything that diminishes the lives of those he loves. And he loves us.

Consider the question the spirit asked before it left its victim:  
What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

There's only one answer to that question.  
Everything.  
I have everything to do with you.

*Wendy*