

Jesus Heals and Casts Out Demons! **Mark 1:29-39**

I believe that you have enjoyed the feast of inspiring sermons by wonderful preachers from Asbury during January. I am glad that Asbury UMC has many good preachers so that I don't need to worry about finding a preacher during my absence. Many thanks to all of our wonderful preachers who shared the gospel message with us. Now, I must ask you to tune your ears once more to my Korean accent! You have heard the messages throughout January, but you must now listen to understand.

It's already February of 2021. How is your 2021 so far? Honestly, I don't feel much change. With the covid-19 vaccine rollout, we glimpse light at the end of the tunnel but there can be another tunnel ahead of us due to new variants of virus. We are tired of it and we need healing from this deadly virus.

Along with the Covid-19 virus, we also have had to fight against deadly spiritual viruses such as deception, hatred, and violence. On January 6th, 2021, we witnessed the deadly Capitol Riot. We saw how our nation has been deeply divided and how fragile and vulnerable our democracy is. Just as Christians are not immune from Covid-19, Christians are not immune from these deadly spiritual viruses. You may have seen some people waving signs that said "Jesus saves" while people invaded the U.S. Capitol. Perhaps, we need a spiritual vaccine as much as we need the Covid-19 vaccine. Our nation, and our selves... we all need healing and salvation.

Jesus Came to heal

Today's scripture reading is the summary of Jesus ministry of healing and casting out demons. People saw or heard about Jesus casting out the unclean spirit in the synagogue on the Sabbath day so on that evening at sunset, people in the town of Capernaum brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons. "He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons." (v. 34) In the ancient world, healing and exorcism were not very different. Ancient people didn't have the medical knowledge we have today so they tended to believe diseases were produced by evil spirits.

I am healthy so I very rarely get sick. Of course, this doesn't mean I have never gotten sick. About 7 year ago, I caught a flu and was very sick for 3 days. It started with body aches and in the middle of the night, I woke up because of high fever. After taking Advil, the fever and pain temporarily reduced but they came back again and again when the fever reducer wore off. Fever, fatigue, headache and the loss of appetite... I didn't feel that my body was mine but that something else was possessing it. I bet you must have had this unpleasant experience more than once. Right? When you get sick, you lose control of your body and cannot carry out your responsibilities. Ancient people thought demonic spirits caused the pain in their body, so disease was understood as a kind of demonic possession. Demonic possession in the Bible is a more aggressive and violent form of losing self and relationship with others. Both healing and exorcism are salvation from the demonic spirits.

Of course, we no longer understand diseases in this ancient way. So we often have questions about if this miraculous healing story is real and if so, how! But if we only look for scientific explanations of Jesus' healing story, we are missing the point.

When I was a little kid, I sometimes got a stomach bug. I couldn't eat well and just laid on my bed. My mother would sit next to me and gently rub my belly while repeatedly saying, "mother's hand is a healing hand. Mother's hand is a healing hand." Have you ever done

something like that for your children? My mother's hand was so comforting and soothing and I fell asleep and got well next day. Is my mother's hand really a healing hand that cures the stomach bug? For me, the answer is 'Yes!' Upon hearing my story, if someone start investigating my mother's hand, the shape, the size, temperature... to try to explain how her hand could heal me, that person would surely miss the point of my story. I am talking about my mother and how much she loved me, not how her hand technically healed me.

Similarly, if we only focus on the miracle itself, we are missing the point. What the gospel of Mark wants to tell us through this miracle story is not how but who... who Jesus really is. Jesus is the Messiah, who would bring the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation and liberation from oppressive powers of the world. Jesus came to heal us and free us from all destructive forces of evil that hinder us from being God's beloved children. Jesus is our savior. That's the point.

Healing, wholeness and service

Jesus heals us. Jesus Christ releases us from the power of evil spirits that bind us. We may not be possessed by some supernatural evil spirit like we might see in some Halloween movie, but we can be possessed by the evil spirits of our time. The most dangerous spiritual possession these days for Christian is Christian nationalism, which is a dangerous mixture of Christian conviction with one's political conviction. As Christians, we are bound to only Christ and nothing else can have equal status to Christ, not even the nation. But so many Christians are possessed by a false spirit of Christian nationalism and try to justify their political conviction in the name of God. We are not free from this influence. Honestly, the positions of the American and Christian flags in our sanctuary seem inappropriate to me because the American flag holds a more prominent position than the Christian flag. Of course, there are many other evil spirits such as racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and materialism. Jesus Christ releases us from the possession of all these evil spirits by showing us who we really are.

I have read a fable. A man got an eagle egg on a mountain and placed it in the nest of chicken. The mother hen sat on and incubated the eggs day and night and hatched a baby eagle along with her other chicks. This baby eagle learned how to find worms on the ground and escape to the coop when a dog chased them. One day, the baby eagle saw a huge eagle flying in the sky and was fascinated by its majesty. The baby eagle asked the mother hen who he is. The mother hen said, "that is the eagle, the king of the sky. But you are a chicken so stop chasing rainbows and find a worm on the ground. So the good baby eagle followed the advice from the mother hen and faithfully lived the fate of a chicken. Don't be a chicken!"

Don't forget who you are. We are God's children. Some say, "Don't let the elephants and the donkeys make you forget you belong to the Lamb!" Jesus Christ reminds us that we are beloved children of God who are created to love God and one another. Jesus tell us who we are by unconditionally loving us. This love is the only thing that can stop us from failing and restore us to our true selves.

Healing Other by Loving

Healing does not merely mean physical recovery from illness or demonic possession. Healing in the biblical story always entails the restoration of social relationship with others as well. In today's story, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. A debilitating fever was equivalent to death for her as she couldn't do the things that humans do, to serve, to feed, to provide for. Jesus "takes her by the hand" (vs. 19) and "raised her up!" The word 'raised' is the word that

was used to describe Jesus' resurrection. The healing of Peter's mother in law is the first resurrection story in the gospel. As she was raised, she 'served' them. To be released from illness and the evil spirits, and restored to oneself means one can fulfill responsibilities to serve others. There is no "individual" healing, but the restoration of broken relationships and the whole community.

We are called to heal others and cast out evil spirits in our community. Of course, this is a daunting task. We often assume that not being Jesus, how can we heal others since God didn't give us the gift of healing? But healing has many dimensions.

I have read a story of a Korean actress, Mrs. Kim, who volunteered to serve in a refugee camp in Liberia, Africa. Due to the civil war lasting decades, half of Liberians lived in refugee camps and Mrs. Kim went to one of the camps with a medical service team. With a doctor, she entered a crumbling hut and there, she saw a woman in her early thirties, laying on the ground and groaning. She was so severely infected that whenever the doctor touched her body, pus came out. There was nothing they could do so they cleaned her wounds with antiseptic and removed pus for hours. When they were done, the young lady peacefully passed away. Mrs. Kim felt as if she had been waiting for them to come, someone who could take care of her at the end of her life. When they have finished cleaning her wounds, the lady smiled at them. Before she drew her last breath, she told the doctor and Mrs. Kim. "I am happy now." Her life may have been filled with suffering but she could leave in happiness and peace because of the loving acts of other human beings. It was a moment of healing in her last moments. Our small acts of kindness and love can be a last-minute healing for someone.

What did Jesus do with those who were sick and possessed by evil spirits in the night? Jesus sat with them, acknowledged their suffering and maybe cried with them. And he touched and healed them with love. We have experienced that love. Haven't we?

Mother Thresa said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." With the great love Christ imparted in our hearts, serve and heal our neighbors and cast out demons in our society. God will lead our way. Amen.