

Sermon - Isaiah 40:21-31 Mark 1:29-39 Feb. 8, 2009

Jesus, and the Demons that Bedevil Us

How much our modern world wants to put Jesus in his proper place. Pastor Wilhelmi preached out of the question last Sunday – Jesus – what have you to do with us? And this week that question still echoes, at least in my ears. Who is Jesus for us? Who will we let him be?

Wise teacher, social reformer, superb story teller, a conscience for us all, healer and caster out of demons - and - he was many other things, too... son, brother, carpenter, friend - cross bearer, resurrected one, savior.

And, what we call him, what we most recall of him, colors what we think of who Jesus is for us. And who he is for us will make a major difference in how we live.

Please pray with me. Lord, by Your power we live and move and have our being. Help us to hear your word and so know how to live more fully, joyfully, faithfully in the way of Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior. Amen.

I suspect that for most of us, and most of our world, our views of Jesus lean toward what seem the more human aspects of his life. Son, and brother, carpenter and yoke maker, friend and teacher. Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu too, could, and do, relate to his life in these kind of roles. But even we have a little trouble, don't we, with Jesus as one who casts out demons.

But Mark, the gospel of Mark, begins right from the beginning telling us about this extra ordinary person Jesus – this healer from God. Still wet from his Baptism, Mark tells us about how Jesus faced Satan's temptations, and then began his public ministry

He began healing, and confronting unclean spirits and casting out demons. For some people this becomes grounds to dismiss Jesus – and dismiss us if we talk about these things. Great teacher, yes, but there is something unsettling, some thing weird about demon talk. Love one another. Yes, Jesus, worth listening to you about that. A model for us all to aspire to be like. Good stuff to apply to our lives, day by day by day.

But casting out demons – not sure that's a Jesus we're very comfortable with or understand very well, at all. Flip Wilson may have said it enough to make some fame by saying it – the Devil made me do it. But the truth is, isn't it, that with all our doubts, most of us have wondered, some days, when everything goes wrong – if there aren't evil spirits out there trying to get us.

Still – we Presbyterians don't talk out loud about demons, and we're pretty suspicious of people who do.

But, call it what you will, we do wonder sometimes about what possesses us to do some of the strange things we do? What possessed Mayor Kwami to act as he acted?

Or Senator Daschel, or Bernie Nadoff. Or think about a personal thing, Valentine's Day ahead. What ever possessed our spouses to fall in love with us? Some mysteries out there we have no clue about. What powers are at work in us beyond our fully knowing or understanding.

Maybe, maybe, Jesus was addressing something much more basic to our lives than it sometimes seems – or than we are ready to admit. That there are demons that bedevil us, and they need to be dealt with.

Demons that Bedevil us. The psalmist sang - They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. But what if they, what if we don't wait upon the Lord? What if we take it all on ourselves? The decisions and difficulties and demands life requires us to face. Can we deal with the demons in our lives?

Some days, some days, doesn't it feel that way – that we have to deal with demons? That something, yes, someone, just seems to have our number, have it in for us.

You've had the days. The toast burns at breakfast. The paper is all wet in the snow. The battery runs out on your watch or cell phone – heck – both. The traffic lights are all red. The Computer is down at work, at the bank, and even at Wendys. One of the kids gets sick at school, and the dog has fleas. Demons at work.... And that's just the little stuff - That's not a job lost, or a car accident, or a cancer diagnosis.

Sure we know, we know that the world doesn't work the way people used to think it worked. We know about germs and viruses, about Genetic mutations, about brain dysfunctions - all things we used to blame on demons.

And so, we can find the Bible talk about demons a bit dreadful and not helpful. Demons? But isn't there just a little niggle in the back of our minds that reminds us that we really don't know it all by far. And that there is much, so much we don't know about ourselves and the world.

They – the European Union - just opened a billion dollar Particle Accelerator to smash the most infinitesimal particles of life and so to find perhaps the very seed of what makes life possible. Why? Because we do not know what does make life possible – or – what makes life so impossible at times.

Octuplets. Yes we know how to make possible such multiple births. But we don't know how in other cases to cause even one birth to occur. Infertility. And death. Death, for all our smarts, is just one last breath away – some day – for us all. And what is it about us that it takes a law to get us to stop smoking in public places because its so dangerous , so deadly– and – still we smoke?

Demons? Or maybe we would say, some would say, compulsive addictive self-destructive behavior. But is all that just a different name for the demons that – yes – possess us?

Jesus casting out demons – it seems bizarre for us - for our time. Except for maybe a movie – the Exorcist- or other films that probe the unknown. But - casting out demons – it seems demeaning of our faith – of our intelligence.

Because we've been told, and we believe, and we count on finding – all the real reasons and causes for whatever happens.

Teach us good morals, Jesus. How to find forgiveness for our mistakes, and how to forgive, and how to love even the unlovely. Teach us positive things, Jesus, and leave that demon stuff for the past where it belongs.

We can reason things out now for ourselves. Or can we? Can we? What turns a mother into a killer of her children? Or one tribe to murderous attacks upon another in Africa. Or a smart Senator, wise to the ways of Washington, not to pay his taxes? What leads a person to make a mortgage that can't be paid? What of our drive to cure all illnesses, when the sickness behind them all is our mortality – not if, but when and how we will die. Can we care about caring for each other more – curing less - and caring more ?

Some demons still in our lives? I think so. Maybe we have some demons we can't deal with. What was Jesus doing with those demons in his day – and what does Jesus have to do with the demons that bedevil us in our day?

Was he but simply clearly dramatically declaring for all to see and know, where all power really lies in life? Was he not echoing the Psalmist's words and thoughts – and recommendation to his people - a message meant for all people - They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. Kwami. Kwami. Free – at least from jail. But it will take a renewal of his faith to set him free from the mess he made of his life and the lives of so many others.

King David found it out. The Apostle Paul, too. And many others of us, too. The good that I would do, I do not. The evil I would not, that I do. Who will save me from this wretchedness? Thanks be to God in Jesus Christ.

They that wait upon the Lord, will renew their strength... they rise up on eagle's wings.

But – be clear – this is no easy thing.. - for us to wait upon the Lord. We can hardly wait for our computers to boot up, or for traffic lights to change, or to get home before making a cell phone call.

And – what does the Lord have to do with this stuff we have to deal with? Its not God's worry – its ours - isn't it? To fix our bodies, and minds, our economy - to make up for when mistakes are made. It's ours to fix, isn't it?

Or is it? Is it? Are we then, the ones in charge of things – of everything? Is everything rational, and we just need to work it out, think it through? Or – do we know – deep deep down inside ourselves – don't we know that there are powers and forces that lead us to do things that are not rational at all –

Demons that bedevil us. Call it pride - which goes before the fall. Or greed. Or lust, that catches the brightest of us all. Call it disease that causes us to sicken and to die. Demons - drives, urges, needs, hormones or heady feelings of self-importance – and we do the dumbest things that do us and others harm.

And who – who knows way – except Jesus. Jesus knows. Jesus knows. He knew that the people of his day needed a renewed relationship with and a renewed reliance upon God, for their health and their well being. And he cast out demons in God's name. And he became the poster – child for this powerful truth....

That they that wait upon the Lord, will renew their strength... to live with, and deal with the world as it is – where we are not in charge – not even of our own lives.

Jesus modeled life lived waiting upon the Lord. The very rhythm of his life was prayer – and then practice - living as God's person. Prayer and Practice.

It was a telling moment in the story of the Afro-american neuro surgeon Ben Carson, hero of the TV Special – Healing Hands. In the midst of a very troubled childhood he found the answer for his troubled life in God – in God who kept his life centered. And God kept his life centered, amid his remarkable surgical successes – first separation of brain joined twins. Carson was centered by his faith in God... by a power that was outside himself.

That's where Jesus pointed his life – and sought to teach his disciple to point their lives – to the lord of life who gives all the strength we need.

There are some demons at work in your world and mine. The demons of despair and doubt – some say - are the two deadly dangers at work in this near depression. Has the money disappeared – coins and bills? No. Have houses been destroyed – no. But confidence and trust have been severely damaged. And almost every effort to save ourselves gets torpedoed by our stupidity.

Dollars went to banks to rebuild trust – and the bankers crushed all hope of new confidence and trust by using the money in ways that destroy trust and confidence.... Selfishly.

Senators in Lansing and Washington, cried out to blame others – and have not done one simple thing to share the pain their policies caused. Bless President Obama who finally called for caps on pay. But did he call on congress to give back pay as so many americans have had to do.

Demons. They do Bedevil us, still. Wouldn't you say? And we will not destroy the demons in our lives alone. How true the psalmist's words and Jesus actions... When in the deep troubles life often lets us get ourselves into - We can – wait, wait, wait upon the Lord.. and be strengthened.

So many to be healed – for Jesus - and Jesus took time to pray... to show us the way. That we can face all things – through him who strengthens us. I cannot name your demons for you. You know them well enough.

I can only point you where God's words points us all - in the Jesus way - who prayed for strength to face down the demons of his day... May we too be wise enough to pray- as Jesus did – and so find strength as he did - to deal with our demons - And so be - forgiven and freed for full new life in Christ. Now and Always. Amen.

David W. Robertson