

Sunday January 31, 2021 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

**Bible Study – Mark 1:21-28
“What Have You to Do with Us?”**

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants share their responses to the question, “What would be the hardest possession to give up?”

Mark 1:21-28 Context. Immediately after his account of the call of the first disciples, the evangelist tells of Jesus teaching in the synagogue and there casting out an “unclean spirit.” These spirits or “demons” were a fixture of the ancient worldview: unseen spiritual forces, generally evil or unclean, that populated the world of human existence. Today, the behavior formerly attributed to demon possession is generally diagnosed under the heading of epilepsy or mental illness. But the evangelist’s main point in telling the story of Jesus casting out the demon is not so much to show Jesus as a psychologist but to show that Jesus has power and authority over the forces of evil and darkness. The evil spirit recognizes that Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the contest is that the kingdom of God is breaking in and over human experience. Ironically, it is the demon who recognizes Jesus’ identity as the “Holy One of God,” not the people – they see only the power of an exorcist.

Read Mark 1:21-28

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Mark 1:21-28 again

Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- What might be surprising about verse 23? Hint: Where was the man with an unclean spirit? Why is it significant that the demon mentions his knowledge of Jesus? [It was not the religious people who clearly name Jesus’ identity and power, but rather a man with an unclean spirit.]
- Like those in the synagogue where an unclean spirit was found, we too can be surprised when evil encounters us in ways that are shockingly close to home. Why is it easier to think about evil being “out there” and a problem for “them” instead of acknowledging the evil that is among us (individually and collectively)?

- How is authority a theme in this passage? [Notice it is repeated in verses 22 and 27.] How do we allow Jesus to exercise authority over our lives?
- As a group, read again the first of the baptismal questions: “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” What are some ways we stand against evil and/or the demonic in our society and in ourselves? How does the freedom and power God gives us relate to our ability to resist evil, injustice, and oppression?
- How is allowing Jesus to exercise authority over us connected with the ability to stand against evil?
- What are some “-isms” that we should be aware of and work to eliminate? Which of these do you encounter most prominently?
- The man with an unclean spirit asked Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” (1:24) How might Jesus respond if you asked him, “What would you have us do, Jesus of Nazareth?”

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Each person prays sharing their answer the following statements:

I ask God for....

I thank God for.....

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

God of power and might, all the earth and all that is within it is yours. Give us the eyes to see the forces that are at work against you in the world around us. Give us the power to resist and stand against the rulers, powers, and principalities of this world and the power to love those who might seem unlovable to us. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.