

## Sermon for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany, January 28, 2024

In today's Gospel reading (**Mark 1:24**), a man with an unclean spirit interrupts Jesus as he, Jesus, is teaching in the synagogue. "Have you come to destroy us?" the unclean spirit asks. Jesus senses that the man is possessed, and proceeds to confront, not the man, but the unclean spirit. And, miraculously, the unclean spirit obeys Jesus, and departs. The onlookers – all of them - "are amazed."

Had you and I been there, we also would have been amazed. But why? Amazed because of troubled souls? No, there are plenty of those to go around. Amazed because of the ability of Jesus, not only to confront the evil spirit, but to send the evil spirit on its way? No, Jesus clearly had special powers, powers which you and I don't believe that we have.

Aha! That's it, isn't it? We don't think we can make a difference in the life of a troubled person. We don't have the training. We don't have the time. We are not God's Son. And besides, what is an evil spirit anyway? The Devil? You've got to be kidding. A red cape and horns? Be serious.

And so, we walk away from the situation. Or, we step back to make room for God to deal with the situation. After all, according to **Psalms 111**, God can do whatever God wants to do. "Great are the deeds of the Lord .... His work is full of majesty and splendor." Healing a troubled soul should be a piece of cake for God.

But, guess what? This God, who can do anything, and who many times does act on His or Her own, wants our help. Indeed, God expects our help. God wants us to intervene in troubling situations. That's why we are at the top of the food chain. We have the God-given ability to help. And we have the assignment to do just that.

St. Paul reminds the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 8**) that it's not enough to be assigned. We have to carry through on that assignment. And we have to believe that we indeed can do so. We have to trust that God won't expect of us anything beyond our God-given means.

Which takes us back to the man with an unclean spirit. Does God expect you and me to order the unclean spirit to leave? Doesn't God know that we don't have that kind of training, that kind of power? Please God, give us a break.

But a break from what? Surely not a break from helping someone. That's what we're supposed to do. That's what God expects ... to the best of our ability and our training and our follow-through.

Does God really expect us to cast out demons? Just like that? No, but God does expect us to do what we can, including perhaps referring people to those who are trained to help.

And guess what? Who are those expected to help troubled souls? Well, you and I are those people. We haven't been baptized only to observe from afar. No, we have been baptized to be Christ's representatives in challenging situations, to engage the Evil One.

Part of this assignment, this expectation, is to help according to our ability. Not try to help beyond our training, but certainly try to help in some manner. Listening, for example, is something most of us can do. Sharing experiences is another possibility. Reviewing with the person what he or she can do, and encouraging the person to tap his or her own resources. Handling physical tasks, including driving or carrying or lifting, is wide area where many of us can help.

Now, maybe listening, sharing, reviewing and handling are not amazing acts. But we shouldn't shortchange this possibility. Indeed, our helping hand might well be considered "amazing" by those being helped. Maybe not "amazing" to us who are trying to help, but, for those being helped, "amazing" just might be the most accurate term.

The message for us is simply that God will find a way to use our efforts, often without our awareness. Part of our belief system in this setting is that God uses us in ways that we might never understand. Indeed, when someone points out this possibility, we might well be amazed, perhaps not even remembering the occasion.

Today's Psalm suggests that God "makes marvelous works to be remembered." (**Psalm 111:4**). A reminder, not just to those being helped, but also to those, including you and me, who are the helpers. We are designed, we are created, as agents of God's love. Our baptism is our badge. And we are meant to wear that badge more often than we probably do.

Baptism and follow-through is a very special assignment from God. Remember this verse from today's lesson from **Deuteronomy**: "I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command."

Rarely do we think of ourselves as prophets, but God certainly thinks of us as spokespeople. He considers us amazing in our potential to help others. Jesus, God's Son, helps us to recognize that responsibility.

Which leads you and me to keep this assignment front and center in our lives. Which leads us to church. That place, that reminder, where there is work to do on God's behalf. We have an assignment. And we have recognized that assignment. Others have the assignment, but don't recognize it and therefore need a reminder.

Welcome, fellow reminders. Both as recipients of the reminder, and as those who remind others. What we do here is a Team enterprise. Our owner is the Creator. Our general manager is Jesus of Nazareth. Those suited up to engage the enemy are all of us here. And the whole endeavor is pretty, darn exciting. I would say, maybe even AMAZING!

Amen.

## **Morning Prayer - Epiphany 4 – January 28, 2024**

### **Hymn 587 – Our Father, by whose Name all fatherhood is known,**

Our Father, by whose Name all fatherhood is known,  
who dost in love proclaim each family thine own,  
bless thou all parents, guarding well, with constant love as sentinel,  
the homes in which thy people dwell.

O Christ, thyself a child within an earthly home,  
with heart still undefiled, thou didst to manhood come;  
our children bless, in every place, that they may all behold thy face,  
and knowing thee may grow in grace.

O Spirit, who dost bind our hearts in unity,  
who teachest us to find the love from self set free,  
in all our hearts such love increase, that every home, by this release,  
maybe the dwelling place of peace.

### **BCP - Page 76 – Epiphany Greeting**

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of  
the earth.

### **BCP – Pages 79 – Invitation to Confession**

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our  
heavenly Father, to set forth his praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for  
ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and  
our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to  
worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and, with penitent and obedient hearts,  
confess our sins that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and  
mercy.

## **CP – Pages 79-80 – Confession and Absolution**

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

*Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.*

## **BCP – Page 80 - Gloria**

O Lord, open thou our lips.  
*And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

## **BCP – Page 82 – Venite**

Come, let us sing unto the Lord;  
    let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving  
    and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.  
For the Lord is a great God,  
    and a great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the caverns of the earth,  
    and the heights of the hills are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
    and his hands have molded the dry land.  
Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee,  
    And kneel before the Lord our Maker.  
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.  
    Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

## First Reading – Deuteronomy 18:15-20

### Psalm 111

Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,  
*in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.*  
Great are the deeds of the Lord!  
*they are studied by all who delight in them.*  
His work is full of majesty and splendor,  
*and his righteousness endures for ever.*  
He makes his marvelous works to be remembered;  
*the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.*  
He gives food to those who fear him;  
*he is ever mindful of his covenant.*  
He has shown his people the power of his works  
*in giving them the lands of the nations.*  
The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice;  
*all his commandments are sure.*  
They stand fast for ever and ever,  
*because they are done in truth and equity.*  
He sent redemption to his people; he commanded his covenant forever;  
*holy and awesome is his Name.*  
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;  
*those who act accordingly have a good understanding; his praise endures  
for ever.*

## Second Reading – I Corinthians 8:1-13

### Hymn 645, stanzas 1-3 – The King of love my shepherd is

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow, my ransomed soul he leadeth,  
and where his verdant pasture grow, with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but you in love he sought me,  
and on his shoulder gently laid, and home, rejoicing, brought me.

**Gospel – Mark 1:21-28**

**Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins**

**BCP – page 96 - The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

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and the life everlasting. Amen.

**BCP – page 97 – the Lord's Prayer**

The Lord be with you.  
*And with thy spirit.*  
Let us pray.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**BCP – page 97-98 – Suffrages A**

Show us your mercy, O Lord;  
*And grant us your salvation.*

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;  
*Let you people sing with joy.*

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;  
*For only in you can we live in safety.*

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;  
*And guide us in the way of justice and truth.*

Let your way be known upon earth;  
*Your saving health among all nations.*

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;  
*Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.*

Create in us clean hearts, O God;  
*And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.*

**Collect for 4th Sunday of Epiphany**

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth: mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**BCP – page 815 - Prayer for the Human Family**

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



## **BCP – page 101 - The General Thanksgiving**

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants  
give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness  
to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by  
our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we, pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly  
thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips,  
but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking  
before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ  
our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory  
throughout all ages. Amen.*

## **Announcements**

### **Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3**

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;  
Long my our land be bright with freedom's holy light;  
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

## **BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom**

*Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our  
common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son  
that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the  
midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may  
be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to  
come life everlasting. Amen.*

## **BCP – page 59 – The Grace**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the  
Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

## **Hymn 671 - *Amazing Grace***

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;  
‘tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,  
we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.

### **Dismissal**

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
*Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!*



## Epiphany 4 Lessons – January 28, 2024

**Collect:** Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you **shall** heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: ‘If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.’ Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my word in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak - that prophet shall die.”

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

### Psalm 111

Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,  
*in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.*

Great are the deeds of the Lord!

*they are studied by all who delight in them.*

His work is full of majesty and splendor,

*and his righteousness endures for ever.*

He makes his marvelous works to be remembered;

*the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.*

He gives food to those who fear him;

*he is ever mindful of his covenant.*

He has shown his people the power of his works  
*in giving them the lands of the nations.*

The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice;  
*all his commandment are sure.*

They stand fast for ever and ever,  
*because they are done in truth and equity.*

He sent redemption to his people; he commanded his covenant for ever;  
*holy and awesome is his Name.*

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;  
*those who act accordingly have a good understanding;*  
*his praise endures for ever.*

### **Second Reading: I Corinthians 8:1-13**

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him. Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

## **Gospel: Mark 1:21-28**

Jesus and his disciples went into Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands and even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise be you, O Christ.*