

Shut Up and Come Out!

You know something is up when the demons recognize who you are. You know something's up when the unclean spirits take notice that you're onto them. It's one thing when your allies recognize you for who you are. It's quite another thing when your enemies recognize you as well.

Jesus first confronts a demon in the opening chapter of Mark and continues to call them out throughout the rest of the Gospel. Mark is very big on Jesus exorcising demons, which is why it is right there in the first chapter. There are at least eight instances in this Gospel where Jesus either directly or indirectly addresses and confronts demons and unclean spirits.

Why are these stories so important to Mark? Because he knows there is a cosmic battle of good and evil that is manifesting itself within the hearts and minds of people and communities. The unclean spirits are opposed to everything that Jesus is.

Jesus is about light and life, justice and grace. All of that is what the powers of domination work so hard to destroy. So when Jesus comes walking into the synagogue to teach, to open peoples eyes, to proclaim the good news – you better believe the demons are on high alert.

This is exactly what the church is set up to do as well. This is good news to a lot of people. But not for everyone. For the powerful, the wealthy, and the privileged who profit from systems of oppression and addiction, Jesus' ministry is not good news at first.

Many clergy know just how hard it can be to try to bring good news to their congregations. Many pastors have preached a sermon they knew was good news, only to have someone come all up in their face in anger, indignation and defensiveness. Maybe even breathing threats: We'll leave the church and take our money with us. You better watch yourself, missy, preachers aren't supposed to talk politics! Like I said, you know something's up when the unclean spirits take notice.

Please notice that I didn't say unclean people. Jesus never demonizes people. Let me repeat that. Jesus never demonizes people. This means that we are not to demonize them either. Especially when it comes to people who have been overcome by the demons of addiction, it's important to remember how Jesus handled the demons he encountered.

Steve Ross, in his graphic novel called *Marked*, gives us striking illustrations of what it looks like when demons take over. He shows the Gospel of Mark taking place in a modern context of a society under siege by governmental, military, economic, and religious powers all reinforcing each other in the oppression of the people.

Every time an immigrant is deported, a demon takes over. Every time a person of color is shot, another unclean spirit takes hold. Each time some act of aggression or violence is perpetrated, one more demon slithers in. Sometimes a person witnesses so much pain, so much trauma, and absorbs so much evil into their psyche, it appears that they are the demon themselves.

Maybe you have encountered people who have been overcome with unclean spirits? If you've ever dealt with someone whose life has been taken over by an addiction, you know what I mean. That unclean spirit takes over the person, turns them into someone – something – they are not.

I will never forget watching my brother fall deeper and deeper into his addiction of alcohol and drugs. I remember looking into his eyes and not recognizing the person I saw. Rick was not the same as before the demon of addiction had taken over. I was seeing a completely different person. Someone who could not

be reasoned with. He could not be logical. He had this stony-knife-edge look in the eye, that scared me. He was fixated on one thing only – keeping the demon of addiction alive. Because the demon convinced him that is the only way they would stay alive is by keeping the demon alive. Of course, the whole time, the demon was killing him from the inside out.

And it's not just individual addictions where the demon takes hold. Whole groups of people can be affected. The demon of addiction within one person can get its tentacles around a whole family, a workplace, a church. If you happen to be caught in the middle of those tentacles, it can make you feel like you are going insane.

I think it is also important to remember that a person's addiction is often a symptom of a deeper systemic problem. Pharmaceutical companies have profited from producing and promoting opioid pain killers but have done little to address addictions. Also, some doctors have contributed to the problem by over prescribing addictive pain killers. Decreased funding for treatment centers and mental health treatment and facilities has had a significant role in exacerbating the crisis. Addiction is a complex problem where the individual is demonized instead of the systems that created the conditions where the unclean spirits could take hold in the first place.

Even on a larger scale, societies, systems and institutions can succumb to the demonic. I don't have to remind you, there are a myriad of unclean spirits finding willing hosts throughout this country. Notice how the demon in Mark refers to itself in the plural: "We know who you are." That means there is more than one. In the fifth chapter of Mark, Jesus confronts the man in Gerasene and the demon refers to itself as "Legion, for we are many."

Think for a moment the legion of systemic addictions that have taken possession. We can become addicted to racial privilege. We can become addicted to nationalism and xenophobia. We can become addicted to violence and guns. The #metoo movement has revealed that men can become addiction to sexual predation. A whole economy can become addicted to fossil fuels.

Whatever the addiction is, you can be sure there is some kind of unclean spirit in the mix. When you try to confront those who are hosts of those demons, you'll get the same rage as the person with a substance addiction.

Because the demon is a parasite, it needs a host and it will do anything to maintain and perpetuate its existence. Think about it for a moment. White supremacist storming the capitol. Demons on the floor of the congress, toasting at corporate board meetings, guns blazing at schools, concerts and movie theaters, when we were allowed to go there. Demons as screeching trolls on the internet. It's enough to make you want to roll up in a cocoon with your Netflix and binge watch yourself into oblivion.

But we are the church. We are Christians who have made a commitment to follow Jesus. So Netflix will have to wait. Because we have work to do. We have demons to deal with. Yes it will be hard. But Jesus shows us what we need to do.

First we need to stay sane in an insane place. The world does feel like it has gone out of control. But I think this kind of turmoil surrounded First Century Palestine as well.

Rev. Leah Schade says But notice, when he faces the demons – Jesus doesn't get flustered. He gets focused. We too need to help each other focus. We need to stay focused on Jesus when we are dealing with addictions. We need to stay focused when we're assaulted by all the noise of negativity and divisive politics attack from all sides.

Understand that attacking on all sides is a tactic of the unclean spirits. The demons will either use bluster to distract you, or like the dementors in the Harry Potter series, try to suck every ounce of hope from your soul. But remember – what do they use to repel the dementors?

Expecto Patronum! It's a spell that concentrates all of a person's hope and love into an image that drives the demons away.

Christians have so many options for our expecto patronum. Flowing water. The Tree of Life. The Dove of Peace. The tongue of fire at Pentecost. The cross itself. We need to draw on our holy symbols and rituals to help us repel the demons when they attack.

That's one reason that worship can help us stay grounded in the midst of all the chaos. Gathering together in community reminds us Don't get flustered – get focused!

Second, do not cower – confront in love. Jesus doesn't cower in fear but confronts the demonic powers with a command to be silent and come out. The Greek actually says Jesus said "Shut up!" He does this because of his compassion for the one who is held captive by the demon. When we are faced with the demonic, we too, need to confront in love instead of cowering in fear. How do we do that in our preaching, our advocacy and activism? What does confronting in love look like?

Here's what Jesus does. He commands the unclean spirit to come out. He says, essentially, "Let's see what you're made of. Show us what's really going on. Don't try to hide. Let's put it all on the table and see just how weak and miserable this demon is without a host to give it life.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what confronting the demonic spirits look like.

If you want to see someone silencing the demons of addiction, sit in on an alcoholics anonymous meeting or an AI-Anon meeting, that's what I went to, for friends and family who know someone struggling with addiction. When you go there, the excuses are silenced, and the real fears dueling the demon are put in the center of the circle. No person is destroyed, because remember, we are not demonizing people. We are confronting and expelling the unclean spirits.

One of the ways the church can help bring the demons of the opioid crisis to plight at the individual and systemic level is by engaging in a deliberative dialogue about the issue. Jesus models for us what it looks like to bring this issue out into the open and we need to follow his lead.

Want to see silencing the demons of gun violence and the NRA's industry of death. Follow #ParklandStrong teenagers who have risen up to demand safety for their lives and schools. When trolls, Republican politicians and NRA minions try to attack them, they don't get flustered, they get focused. They don't cower. They confront. And they are changing our country's conversation about guns and gun violence.

Look at the women who are part of the #metoo movement. The thousands year old demons of rape and misogyny and hierarchical power are finally being brought out into the open and expelled. Then came the #churchtoo which seeks to overturn the structures that enabled women to be abused by church leaders.

Look at The Rev. Dr. William Barber's revival of the Poor People's Campaign. When the power structures try to use race to pit the poor against each other, Dr. Barber says, "Silence! come out!" Let's confront the real issue - the wealthy sucking dry the common good, leaving the disenfranchised to fight over the bones. Through the work of this moment, those demons are being confronted and expelled.

See the hundreds of thousands of people who have marched – and will continue to march – to resist the fossil fuel industry, strengthen relationships across different groups to address the climate crisis, and work together with citizens and leaders across the planet. You can be part of this moment to confront the unclean spirits that are literally choking the atmosphere of our planet. And the church must be involved in that work to bring about a more just, clean energy future.

Talk to those of us who have gone to the border of Mexico and ask us about what it meant to see people clinging to a fence they could not get over, but catching just a glimpse of hope seeing hundreds of people coming to give them a blessing. Ask us about the court system meting out “justice.” Ask us about the people we met in San Diego who are demonized as rapists, murderers and drug runners. The demons are being confronted, and expelled by those who bear witness at the border.

Here’s what I want you to know about Jesus confronting the demons through our words and actions and ministry. It’s working! The demons are on the run? How do I know? Because there’s a lot of convulsing and crying out with a loud voice. The demons recognize the Holy Ones of God and they are screaming because they know their time is up! All of this fire and fury is actually the convulsing and screeching of the demonic being confronted and howling because it knows it has met its match in Jesus.

Personally, that’s how I keep the trolls and the white supremacists and the misogynists in perspective. When I see them on the attack, that tells me something. They know we have found them out, and they are being expelled.

In order to stay sane in an insane place: Don’t get flustered. Get focused.

When faced with demons: Do not cower. Confront in love.

Keep repeating the words of Jesus, praying the demonic out into the open and expelling the unclean spirits.

In the name of Jesus – demon of action: Shut up and come out of us

In the name of Jesus – demon of racism – shut up and come out of us.

In the name of Jesus – demon of patriarchy – shut up and come out of us.

In the name of Jesus – demon of exploitation – shut up and come out of us.

In the name of Jesus – demon of greed- shut up and come out of us.

In the name of Jesus – demon of fear – shut up and come out of us.

And they were all amazed and they kept asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! The Church, in Jesus’ name, commands even the unclean spirits and they obey. Amen.