

Mark 1:21-28  
January 28, '18

**“FIGHT CLUB”**

LET’S START WITH A QUIZ THIS MORNING.

I’LL OFFER A LIST OF SIX NAMES & YOU THINK OF ONE WORD THAT UNITES ALL SIX.

EDMUND HILARY, MARIE CURIE, ROGER BANNISTER, JOHANNES GUTENBERG, NEIL ARMSTRONG & AMELIA EARHART.

THE SINGLE WORD THAT UNITES THEM IS “FIRST.”

ALL SIX OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS WAS FIRST AT SOMETHING – MT. EVEREST, X-RAYS, 4-MINUTE MILE, PRINTING PRESS, THE MOON & TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT.

FIRSTS ARE MEMORABLE & QUITE OFTEN, EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. THAT’S TRUE IN WRITING AS WELL.

WHEN SOMETHING IS FIRST IN A NARRATIVE, IT’S A PRETTY SAFE BET THAT THE WRITER DEEMS IT TO BE IMPORTANT.

SUCH IS THE CASE HERE IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

THIS IS REALLY THE FIRST ACT THAT JESUS PERFORMS IN MARK’S GOSPEL.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHO JESUS IS, ACCORDING TO EACH GOSPEL WRITER – IF YOU WANT TO FIND OUT RIGHT AWAY, WITHOUT HAVING TO WAIT UNTIL THE END OF THE WHOLE STORY - LOOK AT WHAT COMES FIRST.

LOOK AT THE FIRST PUBLIC ACT OF JESUS IN EACH OF THE GOSPELS AND THEN ASK, “*ACCORDING TO THAT, JUST WHO IS JESUS ANYWAY?*”

IN MATTHEW, IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, JESUS IS A TEACHER & LAWGIVER LIKE MOSES.

**IN LUKE, JESUS, IN HIS HOMETOWN, PROCLAIMS THAT'S HE'S THE ONE WHO RELEASES THOSE HELD CAPTIVE & PROCLAIMS GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.**

**IN JOHN, HE CREATES UNEXPECTED & MIRACULOUS ABUNDANCE AT A WEDDING.**

**AND HERE IN MARK...JESUS PICKS A FIGHT.**

**YES, THAT'S HOW MARK STARTS THE ACTION IN HIS GOSPEL.**

**JESUS PICKS A FIGHT WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT AND THEN MARK IS OFF & RUNNING AT BREAKNECK SPEED FOR THE NEXT 15 CHAPTERS OF HIS GOSPEL!**

**ONE OF MARK'S FAVORITE WORDS – A WORD THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION DOESN'T LET US SEE - IS THE WORD "IMMEDIATELY."**

**THREE TIMES IN THIS PASSAGE ALONE, MARK USES THE WORD.**

**JESUS "IMMEDIATELY" CAME TO THE SYNAGOGUE, THE MAN WITH THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT APPEARED "IMMEDIATELY" AND WORD OF JESUS SPREAD "IMMEDIATELY" THROUGHOUT THE LAND.**

**THE IDEA OF JESUS PICKING A FIGHT IS CLEARLY EVIDENCED IN THE QUESTION THAT COMES FROM THIS MAN WHO "IMMEDIATELY" APPEARED.**

**IN ESSENCE, HE'S ASKING "*DO YOU WANT TO PICK A FIGHT WITH ME, JESUS?!*" AND THE RESOUNDING ANSWER IS "*YES!*"**

**IN ESSENCE, THIS IS WHAT WE FIND THROUGHOUT MUCH OF MARK'S GOSPEL – JESUS & THE DISCIPLES FORM A KIND OF "FIGHT CLUB" WHERE THEY DO BATTLE WITH THE FORCES OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.**

**THESE FORCES ARE DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO GOD'S WILL FOR OUR OWN LIVES & FOR ALL THE WORLD.**

**RATHER THAN BLESS, THEY CURSE.**

**RATHER THAN BUILD UP, THEY TEAR DOWN.**

**RATHER THAN ENCOURAGE, THEY DISPARAGE.**

**RATHER THAN PROMOTING LOVE, THEY SOW HATE.**

**RATHER THAN DRAWING US TOGETHER, THEY SEEK TO TEAR US APART.**

**FROM THE VERY OUTSET, JESUS MAKES IT CLEAR THAT HE WON'T STAND FOR IT.**

**NEVERTHELESS, IT SEEMS TO BE A STRANGE WAY TO BEGIN A GOSPEL, DOESN'T IT?**

**LET'S FACE IT – WE DON'T REALLY CARE FOR STORIES LIKE THESE – THE EXORCISM STORIES OF THE GOSPELS.**

**THEY SEEM SO FAR OUTSIDE OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD & OUR UNDERSTANDING OF MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL ILLNESS & EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR.**

**THE IDEA OF SOMEONE BEING POSSESSED BY AN EVIL SPIRIT IS SIMPLY OUTSIDE OF OUR MODERN REALM OF THINKING.**

**WE CONJURE UP LINDA BLAIR-TYPE IMAGES & AUTOMATICALLY DISMISS SUCH A THING AS BELONGING TO ANOTHER AGE & ANOTHER PERIOD OF HISTORY.**

**AND YET, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHEN YOU READ A BOOK LIKE SCOTT PECK'S PEOPLE OF THE LIE, YOU'RE FORCED TO RE-THINK YOUR DISMISSAL BECAUSE PECK OFFERS COUNTLESS EXAMPLES OF SEEMINGLY NORMAL, EVERYDAY PEOPLE WHO CLEARLY HAVE SOME EVIL FORCE WORKING IN THEIR SOUL.**

**WHEN YOU LOOK AT THIS MAN IN MARK'S GOSPEL, IT'S HARD TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE MAN HIMSELF & THE SPIRIT THAT CONTROLS HIM.**

**THE MAN & THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT ARE IDENTICAL IN SOME WAYS – ONE WOULD ENCOUNTER BOTH AT THE SAME TIME.**

**IT WOULD BE THE MAN'S MOUTH MOVING AS THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT IS TALKING.**

**BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY ARE CLEARLY DIFFERENT – MOST OBVIOUSLY WHEN THE SPIRIT COMES OUT OF THE MAN.**

**I THINK IT BECOMES A PROBLEM IF WE LEAN EITHER ONE WAY OR THE OTHER – MAKING THEM EXACTLY THE SAME OR COMPLETELY SEPARATING THEM.**

**IF YOU MAKE THEM THE SAME, YOU SEE THE MAN AS LITTLE MORE THAN EVIL.**

**IF YOU SEPARATE THEM ENTIRELY, YOU DISMISS THE TREMENDOUS TRAGEDY OF HIS LIFE & THE IMMENSE PAIN & AGONY HE HAS BEEN FORCED TO ENDURE BECAUSE OF THE WAY THAT EVIL HAS POSSESSED HIM.**

**I DON'T INTEND THE TITLE OF THIS SERMON – “FIGHT CLUB” – TO IN ANY WAY BE CONNECTED TO THE BOOK AND MOVIE OF THE SAME NAME.**

**HOWEVER, THOSE OF YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE MOVIE MAY SEE A CONNECTION IN THE EFFORT TO SEPARATE THE AFFLICTED MAN FROM THE SPIRIT WHICH POSSESSES HIM & THE ED NORTON AND BRAD PITT CHARACTERS IN “FIGHT CLUB.”**

**THIS STORY IN MARK'S GOSPEL IS CLEARLY ONE WHICH MOST OF US WOULD RATHER AVOID.**

**WE'D RATHER NOT READ IT & WE MIGHT BE INCLINED TO DISMISS IT ALTOGETHER.**

**BUT IF WE LOOK AT THIS STORY – INTENTIONALLY LOCATED AT THE BEGINNING OF MARK'S GOSPEL – AS SETTING THE STAGE FOR EVERYTHING ELSE WHICH FOLLOWS, WE MIGHT LOOK AT IT DIFFERENTLY.**

**IF WE SEE THIS STORY PREPARING US FOR A SERIES OF FIGHTS IN WHICH JESUS & HIS DISCIPLES WILL ENGAGE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE GOSPEL, WE MAY FIND THAT IT HAS MEANING IN OUR OWN LIVES.**

**IF WE SEE JESUS DOING BATTLE WITH THE FORCES OF EVIL IN THE WORLD, PERHAPS WE CAN SEE HIM DOING BATTLE WITH THE FORCES OF EVIL IN OUR OWN LIVES.**

**WHEN I LOOK AT THIS STORY IN THAT FASHION, I CAN SEE THAT I, TOO, HAVE BEEN POSSESSED AT TIMES.**

**I TRUST YOU HAVE AS WELL.**

**IT ISN'T JUST SOMEONE ELSE WHO EXPERIENCES THIS.**

**IT ISN'T JUST THE RARE FRINGE-OF-SOCIETY TYPES THAT FIND THEMSELVES POSSESSED.**

**AFTER ALL, THIS MAN WAS WORSHIPPING IN THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE SABBATH.**

**THIS MAN WAS WORSHIPPING IN CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNING.**

**THIS MAN IS YOU & HE'S ME.**

**IF WE'RE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, WE HAVE TO ADMIT WE ARE ALL POSSESSED ON OCCASION.**

**I KNOW I AM.**

**MAYBE IT'S AN IRRATIONAL ANGER.**

**MAYBE IT'S A HARD-HEARTED SPIRIT.**

**MAYBE IT'S AN UNFORGIVING HEART.**

**WHATEVER IT IS, WE ALL BECOME POSSESSED AT TIMES BY SOME EVIL FORCE THAT TRIES TO CONTROL US & DESTROY US.**

**PERHAPS WE SEE IT MOST CLEARLY IN DEADLY & DESTRUCTIVE ADDICTIONS – ALCOHOL, DRUGS, PORNOGRAPHY, GAMBLING.**

**SOMETIMES IT'S AN ADDICTION TO WORK.**

**SOMETIMES IT'S GREED.**

**MAYBE IT'S JEALOUSY OR GLUTTONY.**

**PERHAPS IT'S PRIDE...OR MAYBE PREJUDICE.**

**THE LIST IS VIRTUALLY ENDLESS OF THE EVIL FORCES THAT LONG TO CONTROL US & DESTROY OUR LIVES.**

**THAT'S WHY THIS PASSAGE CAN BE SO POWERFUL FOR US & IT'S WHY MARK INCLUDES IT AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF HIS GOSPEL.**

**IT'S REALLY A PASSAGE OF HOPE.**

**IT'S A STORY OF COMFORT & ASSURANCE.**

**YOU'RE THAT POSSESSED MAN THAT SHOWED UP IN WORSHIP ONE DAY WHEN JESUS HAPPENED TO BE PRESENT.**

**MAYBE YOU DIDN'T SHOUT AT HIM.**

**MAYBE YOU DIDN'T ASK HIM IF HE WANTED TO PICK A FIGHT WITH YOU.**

**MAYBE YOU DIDN'T EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU HAD A PROBLEM.**

**MAYBE YOU HID THE FACT THAT YOU WERE POSSESSED BY AN EVIL FORCE THAT WAS TRYING TO DESTROY YOUR LIFE.**

**IT DOESN'T MATTER.**

**IT DOESN'T MATTER BECAUSE JESUS ALREADY KNOWS.**

**HE KNOWS YOU BETTER THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF.**

**HE KNOWS YOU HAVE A PROBLEM.**

**HE KNOWS YOU WANT HELP.**

**HE KNOWS YOU'RE TRYING YOUR BEST TO RID YOURSELF OF THAT EVIL FORCE IN YOUR LIFE.**

**BUT HE ALSO KNOWS THAT YOU CAN'T DO IT ON YOUR OWN.**

**AND HE WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT HE'S THERE TO DO FOR YOU WHAT YOU CAN'T DO YOURSELF.**

**SOMETHING THAT WE SEE IN MARK'S GOSPEL IS THAT GOD SHOWS UP IN SOME OF THE PLACES WE LEAST EXPECT GOD TO BE.**

**IN THE VERY NEXT CHAPTER, HE SHOWS UP AT A HOUSE IN CAPERNAUM TO HEAL A PARALYTIC WHO'S BEEN DROPPED THROUGH THE ROOF BY HIS FRIENDS.**

**AND THEN HE SHOWS UP AT THE HOUSE OF A HATED TAX COLLECTOR NAMED MATTHEW.**

**AT THE END OF THE GOSPEL, HE SHOWS UP AT THE CROSS IN THE VOICE OF A ROMAN CENTURION WHO ACKNOWLEDGES WHO JESUS IS WHEN HE SAYS, *“TRULY, THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD!”***

**AND HERE, HE SHOWS UP NEXT TO A MAN POSSESSED BY AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT.**

**OUR GOD IS A GOD OF THE BROKEN, THE BEATEN & THE BATTLE-WEARY.**

**GOD SEES YOUR DEEP NEED & CHRIST COMES TO STAND AT YOUR SIDE & WALK WITH YOU THROUGH YOUR DARKEST NIGHTS.**

**GOD ALSO INVITES YOU TO SEE THE BROKENNESS AROUND YOU - THOSE OF YOUR OWN FAMILY, YOUR CO-WORKERS OR FELLOW-STUDENTS, YOUR FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS.**

**HE ENCOURAGES YOU TO JOIN THE BATTLE THAT HE’S WAGING AGAINST THE EVIL FORCES IN THE WORLD THAT WOULD SEEK TO DO HARM.**

**HE CHALLENGES YOU TO SEE THOSE PLACES WHERE GOD HAS CHOSEN TO WORK THROUGH YOU TO DRAW ANOTHER PERSON TO NEW LIFE.**

**GOD IS STILL AT WORK TODAY, CASTING OUT THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS OF THE WORLD & WANTS TO ENLIST YOUR EFFORTS IN THE DIVINE BATTLE AGAINST EVIL.**

**THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT, THE MORE I UNDERSTAND WHY MARK BEGINS HIS GOSPEL THIS WAY.**

**I UNDERSTAND WHY IT STARTS IN A PLACE OF WORSHIP & WHY IT STARTS WITH A BATTLE SCENE.**

**IT WAS GOOD FOR THAT MAN TO BE IN WORSHIP THAT DAY BECAUSE IT WAS THERE THAT HE MET JESUS.**

**IT WAS THERE THAT A JOURNEY TOWARD HEALING & WHOLENESS  
COULD BEGIN.**

**IT WAS THERE THAT HE ALLOWED JESUS TO STEP INTO HIS LIFE &  
ENGAGE IN A BATTLE THAT HE COULDN'T WIN ON HIS OWN.**

**SO, TOO, IT IS GOOD FOR YOU TO BE HERE TODAY.**

**IT IS HERE – MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE – THAT WE CAN MEET  
JESUS.**

**IT'S HERE THAT OUR OWN JOURNEY TOWARD HEALING & WHOLENESS  
CAN BEGIN.**

**IT IS HERE THAT YOU CAN INVITE JESUS TO STEP INTO YOUR LIFE &  
HELP YOU FIGHT THE BATTLES THAT YOU CAN'T WIN ON YOUR OWN.**

**YOU'RE HERE – AND THAT'S A GOOD THING.**

**AND SO IS HE – AND THAT'S EVEN BETTER.**

**WHATEVER THE BATTLE IS THAT YOU'RE WAGING AGAINST AN EVIL  
FORCE THAT WOULD SEEK TO POSSESS YOU, BE COMFORTED & ASSURED  
THAT IN THE END, JESUS WILL HELP YOU EMERGE AS THE VICTOR. AMEN.**

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