

**January 28, 2018 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20**  
**1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Mark 1:21-28**

[With ideas from the ISAIAH Claiming Our Voices Facilitator Guide, fall 2017.  
Working Preacher, Karoline Lewis for this date. David Lose.net, including comments, for this date.]

**Grace and peace, light to you, from Jesus Christ who is our hope. Amen**

**What is this? That's what the people ask after this episode unfolds in their synagogue.**

And then, almost as if answering their own question, they say, it's a new teaching-with authority!

I have to confess: I have read and preached this gospel passage plenty of times, but this week I am convicted by it again—and that's good!

Maybe it's our collective desire, our need, for new models of authority. These are hard times.

Maybe it's the cry from all corners, and inside myself, for a power strong enough to shift everything.

I'm finding this story of Jesus casting out the unclean spirit relevant in a whole new way.

Now ☺ I'm sure that your mind never wanders as you listen to the readings,

so I invite you to engage with this gospel story again, now, more deeply.

using what some have experienced before, an "I wonder, I notice sermon."

We'll use this method today and probably again next week,

on this passage and then on the healing story that follows on it's tail.

**In an "I wonder, I notice sermon," we all become preachers for a time.**

We've already heard it once, and in a few minutes I'll read it again, slowly.

You may want to have your bulletins handy.

Your job is to interrupt me—and I mean it.

Don't just interrupt in any old way (hey, that reminds me of a story I heard one time...)

Your job is to interrupt me after a word or a phrase.

And when you interrupt, say (loudly, clearly) either "I wonder... (whatever you wonder)" or "I notice..."

I'll repeat what you said so that it's amplified and all can hear it better.

After that, another person may jump in with something they wonder or notice,

or I'll continue until I'm interrupted again.

**Here's how it might sound starting from the beginning of this passage:**

"They went to Capernaum..." and someone may jump in and say:

I wonder who They are.

Or, I notice they are on the move.

Or, I wonder why they chose Capernaum.

You get the picture.

**Only two rules...**

**1. There are no wrong answers, let the Spirit lead us as a community.**

You may feel silly or like you don't know enough, but really those can be the best interruptions.

Your job is to interrupt... It only works if you do.

**2. Use the structure. Begin your interruption with I wonder... or I notice...**

**Ready? First we need to make sure we've got voices, we need to test them out.**

(READ)

**Thank you!**

**Let me offer a few of the things** I noticed and wondered about, and then make some connections.

**I notice that this scene comes early, very early in Mark.**

This is Mark who didn't waste any time with sweet baby Jesus or terrified shepherds.

This is Mark who enters right in telling us: "The beginning of the Good New of Jesus"

In one breath John is crying in the wilderness and the voice from heaven is declaring Jesus the beloved.

In the next breath, Jesus is driven into the wilderness for 40 days, but only for 2 verses.

In Mark, he's got places to go, disciples to call, and then, today's inaugural story.

**I notice that in Mark's gospel, it's *this* early story that frames all the rest still to come?**

That's how important this is:

Freeing people from their demons is at the very heart of Jesus' ministry in Mark.

**I wonder why it's tempting—so tempting—for us is to get all mucked up trying to define who or what these demons are.**

We get all squinty eyed and pointy fingered, making a mental list of all the evil around us and how we'd really, really like Jesus to just send it packing.

**But then I notice, it's the unclean spirit that first recognizes Jesus, that engages with Jesus.**

And I notice that Jesus engages back, in response, clear, strong, and yet engaged—that's authority.

Jesus isn't scared of this unclean spirit—that man's unclean spirit, or ours, whatever it may be.

**I notice that Jesus doesn't send out the person who is possessed,** Jesus sends out the forces that bind that person.

God is against the forces that diminish life, not the people.

God is against the insecurity and the fear, the selfishness and the hate, the forces that bind up that fellow, and *the forces* that bind us up—oh, I need that unbinding some times.

**I notice how often we demonize people,** when actually, if we're going to demonize something, it should be the forces of evil.

**I wonder at how easily this story becomes about "those people"**, that guy with the unclean spirit, those folks who vote or believe or act or pray differently than me.

The powers of evil are the things that divide us from each other,

that make us believe that addressing what you need, means I can't get what I need.

that we can't both have full humanity.

Really, there is no "them," no "those" people, in Christ it's always us.

**We're in the midst of our capital appeal called Revealing Hope.**

In the fall we entered into a listening process completing surveys and participating in interviews.

One subtheme that arose was a desire to make space for the diversity of our voices, experiences.

Even in a community with some similarity in world view, we do not all believe or think or act or vote alike.

How do we make space for conversation that uplifts our differences, and ultimately makes our unity stronger, more faithful?

That question is before us, and it's good, it's blessed: "There is no them, only us in Christ."

**One more connection:** Have you heard that caucuses will be held next Tuesday evening, February 6<sup>th</sup>?

This is part of our election process and I know many of you plan to attend the caucus in your area.

Back in November and December in our congregation and across the state a few thousand people attended house-meetings sponsored by ISIAAH—some of you participated.

Around the circle in every house-meeting we shared of the pain we or those we love are experiencing related to immigration or health care or racial injustice or economics-it was powerful.

**Using those conversations,** folks in ISIAAH and other partners created a Faith Agenda:

These are basic tenets we seek in elected leaders: honoring every person's dignity, an economy that allows everyone to thrive, and so on.

The purpose of this agenda is not to support one party or another, but to ask of those we may choose to vote for in any party: Will you support the tenets this faith agenda?

Some of you have pledged to be faith delegates, seeking to go all the way to the state party conventions upholding this faith agenda.

Many others are supporting this agenda work.

I share this today because it's one of the bold ways we're holding onto our faithful authority this season.

**As Jesus called out the unclean spirit**, the folks in the synagogue that day asked one another:

“What is this? A new teaching—with authority!”

I wonder what could really happen if we dared “to take on the demons that possess us—and oh my, there are so very many.” (Karoline Lewis)

I wonder what happens when we are part of casting out and silencing those forces that seek to sway us toward idols, that pull us from our faith.

Surely people would wonder, like they did in the synagogue that day, What is this?

But then they'd know once again that God is at work and God's reign is coming in and through us.

**For this is what Good News looks like. Amen.**