

A Three Point Plan for De-Demonizing Our Lives

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Mark 1.29-39

When I was young, my great-aunt Gladys had an operation. I don't think it was terribly serious, but it was necessary. I remember my great-uncle Arthur sitting dutifully by her side while she slept after the surgery. At one point she opened her eyes and said, "Arthur, you're here. Oh sweetie, you're gorgeous." And with that she drifted off to sleep again. About an hour later, Aunt Gladys woke up again, and she looked over at Uncle Arthur and she said, "Oh Arthur, you're still here with me. You're so cute." Uncle Arthur said, "Cute?!! What happened to gorgeous?" Aunt Gladys answered, "The drugs are wearing off."

Well, Aunt Gladys may have experienced the illusion of beauty in my Uncle Arthur, but we are sometimes prone to experiencing the illusion of hopelessness. And confronting that illusion is actually what our gospel story today is about.

Mark's community feels wounded. They are possessed by depression, fear, and hopelessness. They are living in tumultuous times and the future is uncertain. They feel defeated and exhausted and in response Mark writes a gospel...Good News for people who are in desperate need of just that, Good News.

Mark doesn't try to get his audience to deny the difficulties in their lives. The problems are real...not only are they real, they are nefarious, diabolical, malevolent. That is, at least, how they are experienced. He validates the pain of his people. He doesn't trivialize it, nor does he suggest that simply ignoring it will make it go away. But he does suggest that there is a way to deal with the demons. There is a way, as he says, to not let the demons speak. We can let the internalized tormentors know who we really are...persons of sacred value, people who are resilient, optimistic, people who live in Resurrection Power. When we know who we really are, the demonic thought patterns will become weak and silent in the light of our truth. They'll know us, and we will be able to forbid them from having the last word in our lives!

How we respond to the outside troubles will determine what takes residence within us. If we have allowed the mischievous demons, the attitude of despair and hopelessness to set up house-keeping in our consciousness, then let's get those demonic, troublesome nuisances out. Life is hard enough "out there" without allowing ourselves to be tormented "in here."

I'm not talking about normal grief. Loss, injustice, tragedy, bad news...of course we will feel sad or angry or overwhelmed. But we will have more strength for those situations if we have not poisoned our souls with the toxins of habitual pessimism. Sadness is an appropriate response to sad news. But habitual negativity, complaining, pessimism, fear, regret, self-pity...these demons wear us down and keep us from living in the joy that the Spirit of Love seeks to manifest in our lives. The psalmist reminds us, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning!"

So using story-telling, imagination, and dramatic imagery, Mark shows the demons cowering in the presence of embodied hope. Devils flee from Love made manifest. Mark's Jesus is helping people feel whole again. He is liberating them from the inside out so that they can have peace and hope regardless of what may be happening around them. Mark has Jesus going all around, proclaiming good news and casting out internalized oppression, or as he put it, "demons."

Mark seems to show us a three-point plan to establish inward liberation. There are specific ways we can cast out soul-sickness. Mark has a three point plan for de-demonizing our lives.

1. Mark shows us that Liberation begins at home.

Jesus enters the home of Simon and Andrew and they tell Jesus about Simon's sick mother-in-law. Jesus takes her by the hand, shows her compassion, and lifts her up. The fever leaves her and she gets up and serves them.

The poor woman is sick, and he healed only so she can get up and start waiting on the men-folk? Of course, in a patriarchal culture, that wouldn't have struck the male listeners as all the odd. Even many of the women may have thought, "yeah, that sounds about right." And, Mark doesn't even bother to give the woman a name. An unnamed woman who is healed only to be of service to men, that can't be the Good News!

But as an allegory, this story really isn't about protecting male privilege; it's about offering liberation to whoever may need it.

The point is that everyone is troubled by the fever. Maybe it's contagious. In any case, people are sad that the poor woman is suffering. But her suffering can be eased. People may not know how to cure the fever, but they can reach out to her. They can touch her with compassion. They can lift her up. And if they will do what they can, the fever, the tormenting condition might just leave her. Love certainly won't make her condition worse!

We can touch someone with a kind word, with an act of generosity, with a smile or warm gesture. We can lift someone up, and that act might help that person feel better. And we may just find that we feel better, too. We aren't helpless. We aren't hopeless. We can lift each other up, and when we do that, the devilish fever keeping us down might just flee. That doesn't mean that every problem will magically go away; but it does mean that the problem can't define us! We can rise up and be of service to our community and give the problems a run for their money. Even if we can't change the situation, we can change how we allow the situation to impact us. Liberation begins at home, that is, within, with our attitudes.

2. Mark shows the value of worship. Jesus has just left the synagogue...so he's energized from worship.

When we gather together, sing together, pray together...when we listen to the scriptures, share in the sacrament that is open to everyone, worship with our physical presence, our thoughts, our financial generosity...when we come together for worship, the Sacred renews us, energizes us and we then have that blessing to share with the world.

Jesus isn't alone! Simon, Andrew, James, and John are with him. He's with others who have been empowered by the experience of worship. They are all coming from the synagogue. They can support one another. When one is discouraged, another can keep the fires of hope burning. When one is exhausted, another can step up and offer relief. Not only are we energized by worship, but as we remain in relationship with others who are regularly energized by worship, we find we can keep the energy longer! We are, as we say, empowered by spirit, and that will manifest in our lives as spiritual gifts that we can share. Against the gifts of the spirit, what chance does a demon, even a metaphorical one, really have?

3. Mark shows us the importance of doing what we can.

We can't do everything; sometimes, we may not be able to do much at all. But we can still do something.

"...they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons...And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons...."

Notice the sick and oppressed came to him. Even if they had to have help getting there; even if they had to have someone bring them. They did what they could.

Healing is never forced on anyone in the scriptures. We each must take some responsibility for our own empowerment. If we won't do our part, then we've limited the possibility for a miracle. We

must give what we can, do what we can, show up when we can, smile when we can, pray when we can, affirm hope when we can...we must plant the seed. The universal laws will then respond to our effort. What God does for us, God does through us.

I had a teacher who used to say, "we plant the seed; God grows the tree...God has the hard part." And God is willing and able to do the hard part...in response to our doing our part. When we plant the seed, then the divine laws are set in motion and will accomplish the hard part. But we must do what we can in order to active the divine power that is always available to us.

Now when people came to Jesus, he responded with compassion. Andrew, Simon, James and John are backing him, offering him moral support. The friends of the sick people brought the people to Jesus. The sick people themselves agreed to come; perhaps they persuaded people to take them in the first place. Once they are there, Jesus responds by offering ministry. No one is working in a vacuum...everyone is doing something, and when everyone works together in this way, the dis-eased are comforted, the weak become a little stronger, the hopeless have their hope renewed, and the psychological demons start to loosen their grip.

If we have unwittingly given internalized oppression, "the demons" them shelter in our hearts and minds, we can expel them today. Our liberation begins by taking control of our own attitudes, by worshiping regularly with time, talent and treasure, and by remembering we are not powerless. We can do something, and as we do what we can, God is then able to do what God can...and this is the good news. Amen.

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I am lifted up.
I am healed.
I am encouraged.
I am filled with hope and joy.
I am free.
And so it is!

Final Word: Shakti Gawain quote