

Mark 1:21-28

January 28, 2024

Whenever people gather for worship, they do not, as a rule, bring their suitcases with them. But they do bring their baggage. That baggage may be an illness they are dealing with. Maybe a disability. Some bring the baggage of a strained relationship. Others of a broken heart. We can be pretty certain that no one walks through the church doors without carrying baggage of some kind.

In Capernaum, one man here in our text walks into church, into the synagogue, bearing the baggage of an unclean spirit. Now, most worshipers try to hide their baggage from others. But for this man, it cannot be done. Using the man's mouth, the demon cries out to confront Jesus as He teaches the people.

Now, I don't know what baggage you have carried in here with you today. But I do know that you have some with you, just as I also have with me. And I will say this, that you have come to the right place with your baggage. Here in Capernaum, the man who has the unclean spirit loses his luggage we could say. Jesus removes it from him. He rebukes the demon and drives it out of him.

That sounds refreshing, doesn't it? We may not be carrying around an unclean spirit. But whatever it is that we have brought here with us today, how nice it would be to have Jesus do the same for us.

You've heard of, or maybe even seen on television, those so-called faith healers, who pretty much do what Jesus does here in Capernaum. People in the audience come up with their baggage: paralysis, cancer, and what have you, and the faith healer, in dramatic fashion, frees them of their ailment, their baggage.

Professor Marquart, who taught me at the seminary, took his elders to observe one of these faith healers when he was a pastor in Australia. They sat quietly in the back row. But when the faith healer came out on stage, he stopped in his tracks and glared at Pastor Marquart and his elders way in the back. "I can do no healing today," he angrily informed the audience, "because there are some here who do not believe!"

For that reason alone, we want to have no dealings with such people as these. But there is another reason why we should not be so eager to lose our luggage. In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus says that when an unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and it returns to the place from which it came. It finds it swept and put in order, and it goes and brings seven other spirits, more evil than itself, and they all dwell in that person, and his last state is worse than his first. Perhaps we should not be so eager to have our baggage removed from us. Who knows what will take its place?

What about that man here in Capernaum? Jesus casts the unclean spirit from him. Isn't He concerned that seven other spirits, more evil than this one, will come into the man?

Ah, this is a question we want to ponder. We do not know anything more about the man. But there is something we do know. The first verse of our text tells us that Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching. Jesus boots out the demon from the synagogue, but surely the man stays put and does not leave. And now, that unclean spirit is being replaced, not with seven worse spirits, but with Jesus' teaching.

This is why it is good, yes essential, that we go, not to faith healers to lose our baggage, but rather come, as we have today, to where Jesus' teaching, His words of life, enter us and fill us with good and not with evil.

You are not going to have all your baggage removed from you this morning. Some things which plague us, and weigh us down, God has given us for our good. But the baggage which you carry in here with you that is harmful to you, Jesus removes and replaces with His good gifts.

There is nothing worse, nothing more harmful to us than carrying around the baggage of our sin and the guilt which weighs so heavily upon us. You may not have brought a demon in here with you today. Yet demons, sin, guilt – these are all related to each other.

That demon in our text is angry at Jesus. “*Stop meddling in my affairs!*” is what its words to Jesus actually mean. This unclean spirit thinks that the man belongs to him.

Your sin, and mine, is of the same character. It demands us. It possesses us, and it refuses to let go of us. Our sin is like a demon in this. But Jesus has authority over sin just as He has authority over the demons. As He removed the demon from the man and would not allow it to speak, so Jesus removes your sin from you and does not allow it to have a mouth with which to torment you with guilt.

Indeed, your sin would tell you that you have no hope, that what you have done is too evil to be forgiven. But Jesus silences your sin, and He speaks to you the word of pardon and gives you hope.

He has authority over your sin because He carried it in His own body to the cross. Once He spoke the final word: “*It is finished!*” your sin was, once and for all, declared forgiven, and it was silenced forever. But Jesus' teaching cannot be silenced. And His teaching, His words of life, are for you.

Now, friend, you and I will be filled with something. Either with evil or with good. If we have silenced Jesus' mouth in the past, it is good that we are here. Here He closes the mouths of the demons; He silences your sin, and He opens His mouth to assure you that no demon has authority over you, that your sin does not possess you, but that you belong to Him. Your baptism is proof of this. Here Jesus invites you to His Table where He fills you with His life-giving body and blood. Here Jesus speaks to you His word of absolution: “I forgive you,” He says through your pastor. Your sin is removed from you as far as the east is from the west. Each and every one of you is forgiven.

The baggage of your sin and guilt Jesus does not permit you to take with you today. Instead, take Jesus' words with you into your week. Fill each day of this week with His teaching. Open your Bible and your catechism. Do not allow your sin to be replaced with what is evil. Fill your mind with Christ.

You are precious to Him. Each one of you is precious to your Lord. And so, when you come up to His altar in a few minutes, whatever harmful baggage you are carrying – your sin, your guilt, all such heavy and painful burdens – leave it all here at the altar. For here in the Sacrament of His body and blood, Jesus replaces all your harmful baggage with every good and perfect gift. He replaces it all with the best good gift of all: Himself. Amen.