

Death is Cast Out

Mark 1:21-28

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 1, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are unclean things which bring death.

God warned His people of old about these things. He told them that the things associated with death were unclean. He told them that birds of prey like eagles were unclean. He told them that vultures of various kinds were unclean. He told them that anything in the water that did not have fins and scales was unclean. Things in the water that do not have fins and scales tend to be those things in the water which feed on the dead things at the bottom of the water. He told them that pigs were unclean. Pigs were scavengers in the ancient world and ate dead things. God warned His people of old against mildew. It was unclean. It was unclean because it was the harbinger of death.

God warned His people about their own personal uncleanness. There is a list of skin diseases in the Old Testament a mile long of the skin diseases that make a person unclean. Every last one of those skin diseases is a type of disease that rots the skin and flesh away. Those are the diseases which bring death. God isolates such people from the rest of the community so that the death that is in them does not spread to others. In fact any loss of fluid made a person unclean. Fluid loss meant the coming of death.

And finally, touching a dead body made a person unclean. A person who had touched a dead body had had a personal encounter with death and that death was on them and they were unclean.

In saying these things God shows us the comprehensive nature of death. Death is not simply something at the end of your life that indicates the time when your respiration ceases. Death is the character of our life because of sin. We sinned and God cursed the creation because of us. Since death is at the end of our lives it sends out its tentacles into the rest of our lives so that we fear it. Death sends disease and accidents and other terrible things into our lives. Those things make us unclean.

Even after our Lord rose from the dead and defeated death uncleanness still leads to death. Hospitals put those hand cleanser dispensers on the doors of the patient rooms so that we may clean our hands before we enter or when we leave so that we do not bring an infection to a patient who has cancer. Such an infection may lead to death and so we keep our hands clean so that we do not spread death around. And in Africa right now touching a dead body with Ebola will defile you and lead to death.

There are unclean spirits.

We find it convenient in the west to call them demons. We are familiar with demons. They are minions of Satan. They arise from hell itself. They do the will of Satan not that the will of Satan is complicated. He merely wants to destroy. He does not want to organize. He does not want to build. He wants everything in God's creation dead. He wants everything in God's creation destroyed. He wants God Himself dead.

The demons therefore tempt us because they know that sin causes death. They know that the curse of death is upon those who sin. Therefore they want us to sin so that we will die. They want sin to remain upon us so that death may remain upon us.

But if death means uncleanness and these spirits seek our death, then they are unclean spirits. They come from hell which is the second and permanent death. Their goal is to pull us away from God who gives life. Their goal is that we die and that we stay dead separated from the God who loves us so dearly.

The unclean spirits have nothing in common with God. They seek death, but God seeks life. God created life. God created you to live. God created you to live forever for only eternal life is real life. The life we live now is a shadow of the life that God created. Our lives are filled with the creeping death that is at the end of our life. The death that is at the end of our life is not content to remain at the end of our life. It comes forward in time in small ways. Death seeps from the end of our life into the present time to gray our hairs, to sap our strength, to make us sick or careless and to bring us to itself.

God did not create us to be this way. God created us to live. God created us with strength. God created us to live and to bring forth more life. God gave us food to eat, spouses to love, children to raise and to cherish and to never be without them. God created us for eternal fellowship with Him and with each other. God created us to have our parents and our grandparents and our great grandparents to have them forever. He created us without death. It is his intention that we should live without death.

That is not the intention of the unclean spirits. They intend for you to die. They intend for you so sin and to be defiled. They intend for you to be without your spouse and your children. The evil spirits intend for you to be without your parents and your grandparents. The unclean spirits intend for you to live in fellowship with no one. They intend for you to live alone without even God to help you. The unclean spirits intend for you to lose yourself. They intend for you to die.

That is their intention and so there is nothing in common between them and God. And there is nothing in common between them and God when God becomes flesh and encounters one of these unclean spirits in the synagogue at Capernaum.

The unclean spirits are bold. We did not hear much about them in the Old Testament, but once God became incarnate and we called Him Jesus, then the unclean spirits showed up to challenge Him. The unclean spirit addresses Jesus in the synagogue and asks Him, "What is for you and for us, Jesus of Nazareth?"

Who is the "us" that the unclean spirit is talking about? If you have read the other Gospels you might think that there was more than one unclean spirit inhabiting this man whom Jesus encountered in the synagogue at Capernaum. There are other people who were possessed by unclean spirits whom Jesus encountered. One person even had a thousand of them possessing him.

But the man that Jesus encounters here in Mark's Gospel in the first chapter has only one unclean spirit possessing him. So if there is only one unclean spirit possessing this man in the synagogue at Capernaum to whom is the unclean spirit referring when he says, "What is for you and for us?" Who is the us?

Unclean spirits are presumptuous beings. In spiritual terms they are bold. They have a lot of nerve. Satan himself was bold to tempt those who made in the image of God Himself. He did it, though, and got away with it. Unclean spirits will presume to speak for you if you let them. This one sure did. When the unclean spirit asks Jesus, "Have you come to destroy us?" he is asking Jesus if Jesus has come to destroy both the unclean spirit and the man whom the unclean spirit possessed.

The unclean spirit wants the man dead. That is the goal of any unclean spirit. When an unclean spirit inhabits you, it wants you dead. Unclean spirits have no other goals. They simply want you dead. So when the unclean spirit asks our Lord, "What is there for you and for us?" he is hoping that the Lord will say nothing. There is already nothing between the unclean spirit and the Lord, but the unclean spirit wants there to be nothing in between the person he possesses and the Lord also. When the demon asks Jesus, "Have you come to destroy us?" he is hoping that the Lord will say, "Yes, I have come to destroy both of you." Then the unclean spirit is hoping that the Lord will destroy both the unclean the spirit and the man whom the unclean spirit possesses. That is all the unclean spirit wants. He wants Jesus to destroy

every person who is possessed by unclean spirits. He wants Jesus to put them all to death because unclean spirits want everyone to die.

That is why it is dangerous to listen to unclean spirits.

Adam and Eve listened to the king of unclean spirits and not only did they get themselves cursed with death, they got the rest of us, their posterity, cursed with death. And not only did they get humans cursed with death, they got the whole creation subject to decay and cursed with death. Now death and uncleanness are everywhere. Wherever there is life it now dies. It dies because the curse of God is upon it because of our sins.

The unclean spirits like it this way. That is why it is dangerous to talk to an unclean spirit. They are clever. They are more aware of spiritual things than we are. After all it was the unclean spirit who recognized Jesus in the synagogue. It wasn't like anyone else did. The unclean spirits are more aware of the spiritual reality of things than we are. They use that knowledge against us in order to get us to die.

But your Lord is smarter than any unclean spirit. Your Lord is smarter than any demon. Your Lord tells the unclean spirit to be silent. Quit talking about death. Quit talking about destruction. Quit talking about what the person possessed by you deserves. Quit talking at all and come out of him. That is what the Lord does with unclean spirits. He casts them out.

When the Lord casts out the unclean spirits He is casting out death itself. If the unclean spirits want you dead and they work tirelessly to bring it about, then when Jesus casts them out, He is casting out your death.

The ultimate demonstration of His conquest over death is His own resurrection. When He rose from the dead all of the unclean spirits were defeated. Now death was rolled backward and new life has been bought to the earth.

This new life also bleeds into the present from the future just like death does. For when Jesus returns to consummate the creation one thing that He will do is defeat death entirely. He will do this by raising you from the dead. Since the unclean spirits have already been cast out in His resurrection, they will not be able to prevent you from rising from the dead. That resurrection life sends its power into the past from the future. The future is your deathless resurrection. That future makes its way into the present in all of the blessings that Jesus bestows upon you now.

When you are healed, when those you love are healed, when the surgery is successful, when the accident was not fatal, when life is extended into old age in spite of medical difficulties, these are all examples of the resurrection power at the end of time making its way into the present. It gives you something to look forward to. You may look forward to a life without pain or sickness. You may look forward to a life without death. You may look forward to a life without grief.

And all of this is because Jesus has cast the unclean spirits out.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.