

Silence!

Mark 1:21-28

Today Mark begins to tell of the healing ministry of Jesus. By the end of chapter one he had already included one exorcism, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the healing of a crowd of people with all kinds of illness and the healing of a leper, all in 24 verses!

I

Jesus as healer was not an incidental part of his ministry. If you took the miracles out of the gospels, as Thomas Jefferson did in his truncated edition of the Life of Jesus, the pages would look like what was left when the paper dolls had been cut out. New Testament scholar Obery Hendricks comments "Throughout his ministry, Jesus treated people and their needs as holy by healing their bodies, their souls, their psyche"¹

Jesus healed every kind of illness, body, mind and spirit. He healed anybody and everybody who came to be healed, Jew, Gentile, sinner, righteous, woman, man, child. He never made a moral demand as a precondition for their healing. God's health-care plan was for all. In today's passage Mark begins with an exorcism, the healing of the mind and psyche, the healing of the self.

II

Jesus was in Capernaum, his early headquarters and the home of Simon Peter. The healing happened in a synagogue. There is something poignant and real here. We bring our whole selves to worship including our need to be healed, however well we try to disguise our need.

Jesus had been invited to preach at the service. The people in the synagogue were “amazed” the text says, by the power of his words. “He teaches as one with authority”, they said, as one with God’s own power.

There was in the service a man possessed with an “unclean spirit”, a demonic spirit. He probably sat in the back, near the door. After Jesus finished the unclean spirit screamed, “What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!” (Note that the unclean Spirit has taken over the voice of the man, referring to the two of them as “us”).

Jesus then, with the authority of God that the people were amazed at, issued this strong command: “Silence! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed the body of the man, cried out in a loud voice and left the man.

The man was healed. He was no longer “us” but himself. He was restored to himself, his true self. There was silence and there was healing.

You remember the Gerasene demoniac living in the grave yard, howling and cutting himself with stones. When Jesus asked the demon his name, the demon said “My name is Legion”. My name is Mob. Sometimes there is a noisy crowd inside of us, a hundred voices vying for our attention, vying for control.

Jesus may be saying to us today, “Silence!” Quiet your mind. Tune out the noise. One secret to being free is being willing to say no. In his pop song, “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover”, Paul Simon sings:

Slip out the back, Jack

Make a new plan, Stan

You don't need to be coy, Roy

Just get yourself free.

Hop on the bus, Gus

You don't need to discuss much.

Just drop off the key, Lee

And get yourself free.

III

We live in such a noisy world, and the noise gets in our heads. The past year may have been the noisiest yet. It's been hard to turn off the incessant news on T.V. My iPad tells me once a month whether my internet usage has gone up or

down from the previous month. It has rarely been down. T.V., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram. My name is Legion.

Then there are the voices inside of your head speaking the damaging words which beat you down. Terrible words said to you from early years, terrible words about yourself you say to yourself. Accusing words: “You’ll never amount to anything! You are lazy. You are stupid. You are bad.” The word “Satan” in the Bible means “Accuser.” We all have an accuser within. These are slanderous words spoken against you, the Beloved of God created in the divine image.

So Jesus’ word can be a life-saving word: “Silence!” Quiet your mind. Turn away from the noise. Be still. As the words of the Psalmist:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be.

(From Psalm 46, a very good Psalm for these days)

There’s a wonderful new hymn that we sing here. It is Christ’s word to us today.

Come and find the quiet center
 in the crowded life we lead,
 Find the room for hope to enter,
 find the frame where we are freed:
 Clear the chaos and the clutter,
 clear our eyes that we can see
 All the things that really matter,
 be at peace and simply be

(Shirly Erena Murray)

IV

Yes, but how? we may say. It is important to start small. Some of us were encouraged at some point in our lives to find a “quiet time”, 30 minutes a day for prayer. It was an invitation to failure. Instead, find those short times, those parts of the day where we can be quiet. You may find such time will grow.

We state an *intention*, as with the words of this poem/prayer by Mary Oliver:

O Lord of melons, of mercy, though I am
 not ready, nor worthy, I am climbing toward you.²

Start small. You will have begun! The English monk, writer of the classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*, wrote: “You only need a tiny scrap of time to move toward God.”

Here is Christ’s word and invitation: “Slow down. Take time.” We are consumed by *fast*. Try *slow*! Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams writes about “taking time.” He turns us to the 4th century desert mothers and fathers:

The desert fathers and mothers might say to young people [not just young people!] today: “What’s the hurry?” They would be amazed to see the way our culture values speed. They might say...It is all right to take time.³

The famous philosopher Wittgenstein said that the most important advice one philosopher can say to another is “take your time.”

An Australian writer tells of taking an Aborigine for a ride the car. As the Aborigine walked the earth he sang songs to go with each spot he passed. They are called “song-lines”. As the man drove his car at 60 miles an hour, the Aborigine began to sing faster as they sped through the terrain, until he crumpled and stopped singing. We are that Aborigine.

The gospel records a few verses down that after Jesus performed all the miracles, he did this: waking long before dawn he went out to “a lonely place, and there he prayed.”

Jesus needed a lonely place and so do we, a lonely place to pray, to be quiet, to reflect and to rest. There is in that lonely place deep within a stillness and a quiet where we can find our true self and thus be with God.

It can be a centering time, a time to assess things. The renown philosopher Jimmy Buffet sings:

Be good and you will be lonesome

Be lonesome and you will be free.⁴

We all need a lonely place. We all need an ATTICC Day: An “Accept The Things I Cannot Change” Day.

Jesus commanded us many things: Take no thought of tomorrow; Let your light shine; Love your enemy; Consider the lilies; Sell and give. But this one, oft forgot, may be among the most important: “Silence!”

Quiet your mind and be still.

1. Obery M. Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Teachings of Jesus and How They Have Been Corrupted* (N.Y. Doubleday, 2006), p.108

2. Mary Oliver, “On Thy Wondrous Works I Will Meditate” (Psalm 145). *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), pp.55-59.
3. Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens* (Boston: New Seeds, 2005), p.53
4. Jimmy Buffett, “That’s What Living Is To Me”