

February 1, 2015

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him."

Mark's Gospel today is all about Jesus' authority in the world.

Jesus the Son of God is the Master, He is God and is the ultimate authority over all people and all things in this world that we live in.

Jesus lived as a full and complete human being; He was, I suggest, vulnerable to all the temptations of unscrupulous and manipulating people in exactly the same way as we are. He was susceptible to sickness of mind and body also in exactly the same way as we are.

Jesus taught us that we must strive our whole lives for our individual personalities to have a devoted relationship with God. Christ taught us that God must always come first in our lives.

Let us define a few terms and expressions I am going to present this morning.

Deacon John's personality is the **real me**....the essence of me living as a human being in this world. As persons of faith we believe we are created by God to live on this earth for a short time, then to return home to be with God the Father

What then are the components of us as human beings ?

There is our body...our genetic based assembly of cells that comprise the machine in which we conduct our business of living.

In order to function the body has the need of fuel in the form of earthly food and needs hydration from absorption of liquid, the natural one being water.

Secondly there is our brain, our built in super-extraordinary computer that serves a variety of purposes. Our brain controls and drives our body. The brain has the capacity to learn and to make decisions.

The brain is our source of memory and recollection. The brain controls the senses of touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing.

We have also discussed the possibility that the mind has other powers that we don't yet fully understand, such as our ability to perceive the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Our brain controls our emotions... providing chemicals that if working as God designed, keep us in balance when encountering stimuli in our everyday lives

The body and the brain, even though they are encased in armor...the bone that we call the skeleton and the skull, they are nonetheless highly vulnerable and much more fragile than most people will ever accept.

In contact sports the effect of concussion, even with helmets can be catastrophic, sometimes not showing itself until years after the event.

Anxiety, depression, bipolar disease and all other mental disease, talked about so much but in my opinion not fully understood by society or even the so-called experts.

Addictions that are so destructive...alcohol...so-called "recreational drugs"...have you ever heard a more ignorant expression for substances that ruin peoples' lives. From our Epistle today creating idols through addiction to money and worldly possessions. Thinking that one is more knowledgeable than another and thus more important

Obesity through overeating and under exercising." if food is a cause of their falling" again from our 1st Corinthians today.

Allowing illnesses such as measles, Influenza to weaken us although they could be made largely ineffective through vaccination.

The knowledge that led to their discovery of the vaccination, again, surely a gift from God!!!

The more complex diseases and conditions where we are at the early stages of understanding both cause and cure. This includes, stroke, seizures involving convulsions, cancer and heart disease.

Vulnerability to those people who would exploit us...financially... morally and ethically. Those unscrupulous villains that lie, extort and lead us down the wrong paths in life.

There are so many more conditions and situations that have a common result.. I see them as obstacles that make it more difficult for the real **ME...YOU...US** to have clear, direct loving relationships with God.

In Mark's Gospel "Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

We are not told the nature of the unclean spirit. I suggest it could have been any of the human conditions I have laid out this morning. It could have been the Juju or Voodoo imposed as a curse by another human being. We just don't know....and quite frankly it doesn't really matter exactly what the unclean spirit was.

What is important is that this unclean spirit was an obstacle between the man and his relationship with God. A roadblock that needed to be removed so that the man's personality could be released and enjoy the love and mutual devotion that God provides us in our lives.

For the first time for years I had a brief but severe encounter with The Black Dog this Christmas. You may recall The Black Dog is my term for Anxiety and Depression. The full story of this encounter can be found in my blog on the internet, but I would like briefly to describe the feelings that the Black Dog invokes when it attacks me.

I feel that I am being physically attacked and savaged by the Dog. I feel that I am a fake and that if people knew who I really was ...they would not want to know me..let alone love or respect me.

I feel I have to hide away until with God's help the real John can come back. At its worst I want to hide away and die.

I have learned through the Grace of God how to muzzle the Dog. The condition is genetic and is recognized as a lifelong battle

But every time he reappears, because he will. I am better prepared to fight back. Every time I am more capable of letting my loved ones through the door when I am suffering.

First and foremost I prayed for The Holy Spirit to hold me in His arms, and allow me to remain connected to my dear wife Karen and my loved ones.

This time, however, I had a surprise; my grandson Alex came into the room, wrapped his arms around me and said "Papa I love you and miss you...please come back to us".

The roadblock was thrust aside and the true Deacon John, Johnny, Papa, emerged and recognized that Jesus **is** the Master of all.

While there had been a short period of time during which I did not recognize God because the Black Dog, let us call it "my unclean spirit" was in the way, nevertheless God was protecting me, loving me and was with me the whole time.

It doesn't matter what the nature of the "unclean spirit" is in our lives, our Lord Jesus travels with us and loves us unconditionally. The unclean spirit however clouds our view of life and as such makes it more difficult for us to see Jesus the Master.

In conclusion let us describe some examples of these unclean spirits:

Loved ones that are subjected to addiction of any kind; bad choices that we make that lead us away from the path of righteousness, submitting to the wiles of very skilled liars and cheats, the pain of loved ones with chronic illness of any kind; worry and torment exaggerated by our own sickness or condition; loss of faculties as the result of the inevitable ageing process: placing one's trust in dishonest or ignorant people.....and on and on

We pray dear Jesus that we keep our eyes on the ball. That we do not get sidetracked or distracted from living our lives according to your authority.

Whatever the situation in our lives, we pray that we always recognize you as The Master, the Son of God, the one who we worship and adore until the day when we are finally home with you in your arms.....

..... Amen.