

## An “Up-Side-Down” Savior

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Bob Gay

So, how do you think that went? Do you think that Jesus did all right his first time teaching in the synagogue? I guess you could call it his first sermon. The people were astounded! They said he taught with authority. What did they call it? A new teaching? Sounds good. And then the man with an unclean spirit just happens to be there and Jesus gets to really show what he can do. It looks like there is quite a buzz going here. His fame is already spreading throughout Galilee. Not bad for a first effort!

I can almost imagine Peter and Andrew giving high fives to James and John. They were there of course. If you remember from last week, the passage before the one read today tells how Jesus called those four apostles. They probably thought things were off to a good start.

Now I do not want to be a kill-joy and ruin the celebration, but there is just one little thing that is bothering me about this story that Mark tells. Why did Jesus rebuke the unclean spirit and tell him to be silent? I mean the spirit called Jesus “The Holy One of God” which is another way of saying Messiah. It seems to me that this is the message that Jesus wants to tell people. In fact, now that we are discussing this whole unclean spirit thing, why did the unclean spirit even say anything? If the unclean spirit is the force of evil, the devil, it seems that the best thing to do is just stay quiet. The last thing you want to do is give good publicity to the other side. Somehow this whole episode with the unclean spirit just does not add up. Jesus just seems to have gotten things up side down.

This “up-side-down” quality is for me a very important part of what Mark is trying to tell us in this passage. In fact, this up-side-down message is a big part of Mark’s entire gospel. For example, by the end of chapter 3 Mark has established Jesus as a Sabbath breaking, demon exorcising, arrogant upstart who associates with tax collectors and other low-lives and is not interested in the religious sensibilities of the establishment. The scribes are sure he is possessed by Beelzebul; the Pharisees are already plotting with Herod’s people on how to destroy him; his family thinks he is crazy; and he appears to have disowned his own mother and siblings. And all that starts with today’s passage.

Why does Jesus act in such an up side down way? Why does Jesus silence the demon? Well, the first thing we have to acknowledge is that the devil is not stupid. The devil is tempting Jesus here – again! If you remember, immediately after Jesus was baptized by John, he spent forty days in the wilderness and then was tempted by the devil. According to Matthew and Luke, the devil was going to give all the kingdoms of the entire world to

Jesus. The same thing is going on in today's reading. The devil is trying once again to put Jesus up on a pedestal by proclaiming him the "Messiah" or "The Holy one of God." Why would the devil want to do that?

If the devil can make Jesus a king or a messiah, then the devil defines who Jesus is. Jesus would be a king on the devil's terms. Jesus understands this temptation and says – NO!!!

So, where is the grace in all this? If Jesus came to this earth as a king and lived in royal splendor and did kingly things, he would have very little to do with us. Where would the call to servant ministry be? Where would the call to take up our cross and follow him be? The devil desperately wanted Jesus to be a king and to stay far away from the cross.

How does the devil, having failed to entrap Jesus, now try to tempt us? He wants us to put Jesus on a pedestal here, right here in Hickory Neck. Enthroned here so we only have to deal with him on Sunday mornings and be sure we do not take him with us as we leave this place. The devil wants us to forget that Jesus walked the streets of his day loving everyone -- without exception, inviting everyone to the feast -- without exception, and, finally, dying for everyone -- without exception. It is now our turn to walk the streets. Will we take Jesus with us this morning so we too can love -- without exception and serve -- without exception? If we do, our lives will be turned up-side-down. Up-side-down because Jesus will take us down some streets we would never go on our own. But it is exactly there, on those streets where we do not want to go, that Jesus will show us a joy and peace that the "right-side-up" world can not give us.

So we have a choice. We can take an up-side-down risk and walk with Jesus. Or we can listen to the right-side-up advice of the devil and leave Jesus here, safely enthroned. It would be so easy to have a mere king for a savior. But thank God we do not. We have a savior, a God-among-us, who lived the life of a poor man, who was an outcast from the scribes and Pharisees, who cast his lot with tax collectors and sinners and fishermen, and who so angered the establishment with his up-side-down view of the world they had to kill him. Thank God we have an up-side-down savior!