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“The Cleansing Voice of Christ”

Text: Mark 1:21-28 (Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus speaks and the unclean spirit obeys. Unclean spirit: 1. Us: 0.

Okay, I admit, that's not a fair comparison - but do you get the point? The unclean spirit obeys the authoritative voice of the Lord, but what do we do What do you do?

Now the unclean spirit doesn't have any choice in the matter. Like it or not -and it most certainly did not, as the unclean spirit came out but not without convulsing and crying like a spoiled child - this creature had to obey the voice of the almighty God, even when that voice was cloaked in human flesh.

But it is not so with us. Mankind, the crown of God's creation, is different than the rest of creation. Unlike every other created thing, man and woman are made in God's image and likeness not simply to obey, but to fear, love, and trust in Him. To know Him not just as God the Almighty, but as our Father. And we not subjects, but His children. Adam carefully formed from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7), Eve lovingly built from the rib and flesh and Adam (Genesis 2:22), and we intricately knit together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

And to this man and woman God spoke, too. An authoritative word. One command. Do not eat from that tree. Just that one in the midst of hundreds or thousands of others. Fear, love, and trust Me *just by that*. No forced obedience. They would either keep His word . . . or not. And you know how that turned out.

Fast forward in time, now, to you. You have been given new life in Christ by the Holy Spirit. For Jesus had a word for you and your unclean spirit, too. In your baptism - as we'll hear next week in Liana's baptism - the unclean spirit is told to depart, and just as in Jesus' day, it obeys. It must. It is exorcised. And in the waters of baptism, a new and Holy Spirit is given, that works faith and gives the forgiveness of sins. All your sin and uncleanness - gone. That you again fear, love, and trust your Father who art in heaven.

So how's that going for you?

You don't have to answer that. I already know. From my own life. When temptations come and we so weakly resist. When we do not what God has commanded but go our own way, thinking that is better. When we don't care about our neighbor as Paul was

talking about in the Epistle today, but instead think: *You got a problem with that? Tough!* But fear, love, and trust in God shouldn't just be a Sunday thing, when you go to Church.

But how often it is, because the unclean spirits are speaking too, to you. Oh, not in Jesus' presence. He silences them. They know who He is and are afraid of Him. But they also know who you are and they're not afraid of you. And so they speak: listen to this, see this, do this. Let me come in for just a little bit. It'll be fun! I won't stay long, promise! I'll just visit for a little while . . . once in a while. But then the visits come more frequently, last longer and longer, and the unclean starts taking over, starts bossing you around, acting like *it's* the boss.

And then there are the other voices in our world speaking, too. Some then tell you to clean yourself up! That's the voice of Moses, the voice of the Law, a terrifying voice, because we can't. We try and we fail.

And so there are other voices to help us with that, too. Because if you can't be clean, then *redefine what clean is*. Because everyone has different ideas of what clean is. What's clean for me may not be what's clean for you, but hey, to each his own, right?

One of my favorite comics is about this very thing. There was a mother telling her children to clean their rooms, so they ask: *How clean? Dad clean?* No, the mother says, cleaner than that. *Mom clean?* the children ask, slightly concerned. No, cleaner than that. *Operating room clean?* the children ask with more concern. Nope, the mother says. And the children gasp and ask in horror: *You mean Grandma clean?!*

The people in Jesus' day were used to hearing such voices too. They were tempted as we are tempted. The scribes and Pharisees were telling them to clean themselves up but they couldn't do enough. And what clean meant was a matter of opinion, too, based not just upon God's Word but the traditions that had mushroomed into an enormous and burdensome heap of laws . . . and exceptions too, of course.

But then Jesus came along. The Word of God made flesh. And as we heard, He spoke differently - quite differently! And ***they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*** Teachings not based on opinion or what the majority thinks or an ever changing standard, and speaking a greater word than Moses. A word with the power that created all things and with the authority that forces unclean spirits to submit.

And yet this word - as powerful and authoritative as it was - did not cause the people to be afraid. They did not convulse and cry out as the unclean spirit did. Because Jesus word was not against them, but for them. His word of forgiveness, which is the only way to the cleanness standard even greater than Grandma clean! God clean. Perfect. Holy.

And that's why you're here. Because you've let the unclean spirit back in. You listened to him instead of to God because he promised to make things better, to help you get what you want, to satisfy your desires and curiosity, to be your friend. It's all good. . . . And maybe it felt good at first, but then you find out it's not. And now you can't get him out. He's the squatter of despair who won't leave; the tenant of regrets who won't pay his rent.

And so just as that day in Capernaum, Jesus enters the church here. This church filled with us who have unclean spirits, and he says: *Shut up and get out!* That's what the unclean spirits hear anyway. You hear it this way: **I forgive you all your sins.** And it is so. And He teaches you - of His love. For He doesn't tell you to get out, and He never will. For you are His child. Instead, He washes you again in His baptismal grace, cleaning you again to *His* standard. He rescues you from the evil, unclean foe too powerful for you. For His word is still authoritative and powerful and does what it says.

And He does not get tired of this, of forgiving. Ever! You'd think He would. As often as we keep messing up and coming back, but no. He *delights* in your coming back, your confession, and to wash you again and again. For to do so is to apply His cross to you. It's why He did that for you. For Jesus died not for the clean but for the unclean; not for the strong but for the weak; not for those who stand but for those who fall; not to be stingy with His forgiveness, but to be lavish with it, John said (1 John 3:1); to pour it out upon us generously, as Paul put it (Titus 3:6).

And now that the cross is done, Jesus' death and resurrection done, that's what He does. He applies the cross and it's power to you. All the time. Forgiving and cleansing and raising. Now, of course, that doesn't mean He loves our sin or that our sin doesn't matter and we can do whatever we want! *By no means!* to borrow one of Paul's favorite phrases. Our Father still wants us to fear, love, and trust in Him alone. But He knows, as we prayed in the collect earlier, that *we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright.* He knows how weak we are - in body and in mind. He knows how slick the unclean spirits are. And so He comes to die and He comes to forgive. And He loves to forgive because He loves you.

And so as the psalmist said, and as we sang in the Introit: ***Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*** And you are so blessed. Your sin covered by His blood, your iniquity forgiven, and His Spirit of truth living in you. And even more! The Body and Blood of Christ feeding you, strengthening you in the ongoing struggle, and establishing you firm in Christ and Christ in you. To grant us what we prayed for earlier: *strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations.*

Which we need, because the unclean spirits are not giving up. You know that as well as I do. And their assaults will continue until that day the unclean spirit feared - that day when the Lord will come to destroy all the unclean and create a new heavens and a new earth. That day when all who are unclean - be they spirits or people - will then be told to get out and will be banished from the Lord and His kingdom forever. The Last Day. The unclean spirit knew that to be a fearsome day for all who are not clean in Christ.

But the good news is that day is not yet. Now is the time of our Lord's patience; now is the time of His forgiveness; now is the time for preaching and feeding and washing and absolving, that you and I and all receive the cleansing our Saviour died to give all people. That cleansing He is here to give, in mercy and grace, to you. For you too have heard His authoritative voice, not against you but for you. That the battle which started in defeat, end in victory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.