

Why Are You Here?

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In Mark 1:21-28, we read the account of what has been labeled as Jesus' first public ministry activity. He enters the synagogue with his disciples, educates the spiritual leaders and attendees, exorcises a "demon possessed man," and establishes a new way, a new teaching. Verse 24 says the demonic man cried out "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?, I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

I propose to you this morning that on that Sabbath there in Capernaum when Jesus entered the synagogue and began teaching in a new way—along with the cry of the demonic man, was the internal inquiry of the insulted religious leaders, and the breathless bewilderment of the synagogue' attendees, quiet cautions of the crowds, and the anxious attention of the new disciples---again along with the demon possessed man-- in their minds, under their breaths, or in their hearts -- everyone had the same question: Jesus, what is your agenda? Simply put: Jesus, why are you here?

I like the Gospel of Mark and the way the narrative moves Jesus constantly from one place to another as though he is leaping from town to town, teaching and healing, engaging and listening as he went. There is what seems to be an eagerness and a high level of excitement as the writer relates who Jesus is, so much so, that Mark introduces us to Jesus an adult Jesus about to enter his ministry. This is quite different from our introduction to Jesus in the Gospels of Mathew and Luke, with their genealogy, engagement story, virgin birth and childhood biographies. Mark's Gospel, which scholars conclude predates the writings of Matthew and

Luke, seems to have been written in haste to definitively remind first century believers of the mission, ministry and miracles of Jesus.

Mark introduces Jesus' ministry by looking back to the old testament prophet Isaiah pointing to the messenger who will prepare the way or point out the Messiah. Then we are introduced to John the baptizer, who is proclaiming a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to people in the wilderness, or in marginal places. John points to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to send a prophet, a messiah to rescue the people Israel from their enemies, and in verse 10 we are given God's confirmation of Jesus' Sonship, when the Spirit descended like a dove, upon Jesus. Then immediately Jesus was led into the wilderness for 40 days, where he was tempted by Satan, and he emerged from the wilderness after John was arrested and he began to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God or more specifically the Reign of God. He attracted a crowd of followers, and sought out a few specific fishermen, whom he recruited as his disciples. But why was he there in the temple, teaching?

From the outset, the prologue in Mark narrates the dawn of the kingdom at the margins of the world, but then Jesus moves from the wilderness outskirts "into" Galilee, and indeed into the very heart of the provincial order: a synagogue in the city of Capernaum (1:21). It is unclear how Jesus, an itinerate preacher from the wilderness was invited to teach in the synagogue, we can infer that he was invited, either way as Ched Myers records in *Binding the Strongman*, Jesus enters sacred space, the Synagogue at a sacred time, the Sabbath. And once inside the synagogue, Jesus establishes a "new thing," that he models for his disciples and followers.

This new thing, this new way was in contrast to the reality of Marks' narrative world and provided a direct reflection of the social reality of Jesus' day: economic and political deterioration, especially in the decade prior to the upheavals of the Roman-Jewish war, had

dispossessed significant portions of the Palestinian population. This included the densely populated rural areas of Galilee. Disease and physical disability were an inseparable part of the cycle of poverty (a phenomenon still true today despite the advent of modern medicine). For the day laborer, illness meant unemployment and instant impoverishment. Does this sound familiar—could be a description of our time. And look, this aspect of social location, which describes the crowds that Jesus was ministering to, represents a major part of the story—yet the crowds forms the background to the story, to understand what Jesus was doing we need to look at what’s going on in the background.

Jesus, Why are you here?

First Jesus answers the disciples and the crowd, I’m here to do community-building. As the source and the resource, He gives those in the synagogue a revelation of the plan of my Heavenly Father to get the church in order.

Though Mark does not specify exactly what Jesus was teaching, we can infer from the statement “they were astounded at his teaching, for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes, that Jesus’ teachings were in contrast to that of the scribes. The scribes were the keepers of the law. They interpreted, upheld and judged what was lawful or unlawful and who was ceremonially and ritually clean or unclean. Most scholars agree that Jesus was not specifically addressing the individual laws but rather the system of laws that justified the religious entity’s alienation or oppression of others. Jesus was willing to defy the Judaic letter of the law when the law failed to extend the compassion of the Lord that Jesus was proclaiming. I’m building community and responding to the needs of all of God’s children.

I’m making disciples, not apprentices who will launch their own business projects or succeed me, I making disciples—followers who will capture my heart and do what I do, love like

I love, serve as I serve. The disciples, whom he had called out personally, who have just left their family businesses and homes to follow this leader, and his message to them is summed up in Matt. 20:27 If you want to be great—serve. This wasn't some corporate enterprise, with upper management getting a large chunk of the profits and benefits, no Jesus was making waves and requiring a shift in our thinking—don't just give someone who is hungry something to eat—but give yourself to the community call of hunger, the national and global community's need. The work of kingdom building is not to be done alone. We become God's hands, his feet, his arms, when we yield ourselves to be God's instruments. If the systems are failing the people, help change the systems.

Well that's the second answer: Jesus, why are you here?—Jesus answers the unexpressed question for the synagogue leadership by responding to the demonic spirits in the unclean man—I came in power to shut down every system that will not yield to me. Somebody say “stop the madness”. Whether the man with the unclean spirit reported here in the narrative is an actual demon-possessed character or a symbolic character representing the Roman Empire's occupation—the legion of soldiers and governmental authorities that impose crippling conditions and anguishing restrictions on those who are outcasts; one thing is clear, Jesus was prepared to do battle with the system. Take notice here that when the unclean spirit cried out, Jesus responded to the unclean spirit –be quiet and come out of him. Jesus is cleaning house, saying I must address injustice whenever and wherever it is.

Jesus, why are here?

To you and to me Jesus is answering I am trying to establish the Reign of God in this place and in you. Will you be my follower, will you be my disciple will you be a part of my community?

I remember when I first began to encounter the Lord for myself. My conscience began to be pricked by the word of God and more and more I began to feel a sense of guilt and shame about things I was doing in life, things that nobody was even complaining about. I was hanging out, smoking a little smoke, drinking a little drink, raising a little heck and I was in full company and loving it. My conviction wasn't as much about what I was doing but more about what I wasn't doing. I wasn't in a sincere relationship with the Lord, I wasn't praying and studying the Bible, I wasn't participating in building a kingdom community, I wasn't concerned about the needs of others. I was void, actually I was a bit like the man with the unclean spirit, not so much in the sense that I had a demon in me, but more in the sense that I too asked, "what could you have to do with me, Jesus?", I could not comprehend why the Lord would want anything to do with me.

I felt a sense of worthlessness, I couldn't do anything right, I was always messing things up in some way, I didn't have anything to contribute and on and on and on. My reasoning was endless—a legion of things. So on second thought, perhaps I was more like the unclean man than I had imagined. Somehow through the excuses, doubt, fear, etc., I accepted Christ's offer to have me join his new community, and I embraced the Love of the Lord.

It took the love of Christ, and becoming a part of God's community, participating in it, working in it,—then I began to experience the freedom from the unclean spirit of self-doubt, selfishness, bias, and hatred and fear that plagued my life early on. I still acknowledge that I am not worthy of his grace and mercy toward me, but that demon of worthlessness has been exorcized as I entered into relationship with Christ.

Jesus says I'm here because I want you to know who I am, the Holy One of God. His response to you and I is that He wants to demonstrate His power through us, making us the

instruments which God wants to use to bring an end to the strongholds that oppress and alienate those who are living in the margins.

Finally, Jesus asks you and me, “Why are you here?”

Are you here to help to build community? So you feel outside the safety of a personal relationship with Jesus? Are you here seeking kinship. Are you here for deliverance. Whatever it is will you yield to the call he’s making on your life to be a disciple today. Let Christ launch His mission in us. Let him demonstrate his power to heal and love and forgive and help through us. He’s calling us to engage in the world to draw others to Him. If we are to follow the example of Jesus, we must work on community-building, meeting the needs of those living in the margins, confront injustice, and present people with the opportunity to know who Jesus is, so let’s get to work, that’s why we’re here.