

## “Possessed”

“My battles are fought out inside, with my own demons.”

Etty Hillesum

In a recent UCC Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, Rev. Copenhaver commented on an excerpt from Isaiah 5:1-5: *Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! He began his reflection in this way: Does worship in your church include a prayer of confession? If so, it is probably near the beginning of the service. One reason for this placement is that God’s presence reveals things to us. In God’s clarifying presence we see things about our lives that we might not see otherwise. So when Isaiah had a dramatic encounter with God in the temple, his first response was confession . . . Some congregations no longer include a prayer of confession in their worship because the practice is considered too “negative.” They contend that people have enough difficulties in their lives without the church adding to the burden. But confession is not about adding a burden. Quite the opposite. It is about being unburdened. Ultimately, there is no joy in denial. But there can be great joy in receiving forgiveness.*

Being unburdened from the negative spirits that tormented him was exactly what happened to the possessed man who interrupted Jesus while he was teaching in the synagogue. As you remember, he broke the spell that Jesus’ new teaching was having over the religiously faithful in the synagogue with the words: *“What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you’re up to! You’re the Holy One of God and you’ve come to destroy us!”* Bingo! (shouts the reader of the story). What followed next was a miraculous demonstration of Jesus’ new teaching which does what it says. Jesus said: *“Quiet!”* Get out of him!” . . . which caused a loudly protesting demon to let go of its hold on the man.

That day, everyone was amazed in the power of God’s Word and Jesus’ work of silencing and casting out every demon in the human spirit that opposed goodness in creation, loving-kindness, and the merciful justice of God. Theologian Rita Brock commented: *The image of Jesus as exorcist is someone who has experienced his own demons* (Mark 1:12-13). *The temptation stories point to the image of a wounded healer,*

*to an image of one who by his own experience understands vulnerability and internalized oppression. In having recovered their own hearts, healers have some understanding of the suffering of others. Naming the demons means knowing the demons . . . The gospels imply that anyone who exorcises cannot be a stranger to demons . . . to have faced our demons is never to forget their power to hurt and never to forget the power to heal that lies in touching broken-heartedness . . . Jesus hears, below the demon noises, an anguished cry for deliverance. Through . . . mutual touching . . . community is co-created as a continuing, liberating, redemptive reality* (Imaging the Word, p.130).

In our day, we too are amazed whenever God’s Word disarms and frees us from our demons. In the movie, *Deep End of the Ocean*, the elder of two brothers was tormented by the kidnapping of his younger brother. It happened when his brother was three and he was six. His mother had left him in charge of holding his younger brother’s hand and watching the luggage while she checked them into a hotel. In the two minute interval of turning her back, a woman snatched her son and he was gone. He was lost to the family for six years before he was finally found. His home coming was awesome but it did not banish the spirit that was tormenting the older brother. That did not happen until one day when he was helping his younger brother carry a piece of luggage into their home. When they picked it up together the handle slipped from both of their hands. It was in that moment that the older brother knew what had been tormenting him for years. He remembered words . . . words that he had said just before the kidnapper snatched up his little brother. Horrible, repressed words that had caused years of guilt and bad behavior. When the haunting words filled his mind, he fell speechless and motionless as the piece of luggage hit the ground. His younger brother said: “What’s wrong?” “Just before you were kidnapped, I said to you . . . **LET GO OF MY HAND. STOP BOTHERING ME. GET LOST.**” Immediately his brother replied: “It wasn’t your fault. All kids say that. Let’s go inside.” The demon was named and understood. In the intimate interchange of compassionate grace---the unforgiving spirit that had tormented his elder brother for years---was sent packing---never to return again.

Prayer: Lord, speak your Word that our soul may be healed. Amen.

Mark 1:21-28

Suddenly while still in the meeting place, Jesus was interrupted by a man who was deeply disturbed and yelling out, "What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you're up to! You're the Holy One of God and you've come to destroy us! Jesus shut him up: "Quiet!" Get out of him!" The afflicting spirit threw the man into spasms, protesting loudly—and got out. Everyone there was incredulous, buzzing with curiosity. "what's going on here? A new teaching that does what it says?" He shuts up defiling, demonic spirits and sends them packing!" News of this traveled fast and was soon all over Galilee.



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, detail

Munch's image of the tormented screamer in the nightmarish landscape has become an icon of the terrors and isolation of modern-day life.

(Imaging the Word, vol. 3, p. 129)

### "Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit"

Rev. Thomas Troeger

Silence, frenzied, unclean spirit cried God's healing Holy One  
Cease your ranting! Flesh can't bear it; flee as night before the sun."  
At Christ's words the demon trembled, from its victim madly rushed.  
While the crowd that was assembled . . .  
stood in wonder, stunned and hushed.

Lord, the demons still are thriving, in the gray cells of the mind;  
Tyrant voices, shrill, and driving, twisted thoughts that grip and bind;  
Doubts that stir the heart to panic, fears distorting reason's sight,  
Guilt that makes our loving frantic, dreams that cloud the soul with fright.

Silence Lord, the unclean spirit in our mind and in our heart;  
Speak your word that when we hear it, all our demons shall depart.  
Clear our thought and calm our feeling; still the fractured, warring soul  
While the crowd that was assembled . . .  
stood in wonder, true and whole.



Linda Post, *Solstice*, detail