

January 5, 2020

## Mark 1:21-45

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**The Book of Mark** is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. This was a time of growing and great unrest between the Israelites and the Romans who occupied their land which would result in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman Army in 70 CE. Mark's gospel is simple and direct and focuses in the first half around the question of the identity of Jesus and then secondly around the theme of conflict between Jesus and the forced aligned against him.

*sabbath* the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the week, when no work was done. The day beginning at sunset and ending at sunset was devoted to religious instructions and giving thanks.

**unclean spirit** the expression comes from two words: ἀκάθαρτος pronounced akathartos, meaning *not pure* (because mixed), such as. *adulterated* with "*a wrong mix*" and hence "*unclean*" (because tainted by sin). It's the opposite of καθαίρτος - katharos meaning that which is separated (purged), hence "clean" (pure) because unmixed (without undesirable elements); (figuratively) spiritually clean because purged (purified by God), i.e. free from the contaminating (soiling) influences of sin. Most like the original state without contamination, close to, if not created the most clearly in the image of God. (See Genesis 1:27:" So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." And Genesis 2:7 " then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life* [*pneúma*]; and the man became a living being.

πνεῦμα pronounced pneuma : spirit (Spirit), wind, or breath. The most frequent meaning (translation) of (pneúma) in the NT is "spirit" ("Spirit"). Only the context however determines which sense(s) is meant.

So it can be translated as unclean, or impure spirit. Theologically it could be understood as having a breath that is twisted, contaminated from that first given by God in

<sup>21</sup> [Jesus and his disciples] went to Capernaum; and *when the sabbath came*, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an **unclean spirit**, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, *came out of him.* <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the **unclean spirits**, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then *the fever left her*, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup> *That evening, at sunset*, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

<sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message

there also; for that is what I came out to do.”<sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

<sup>40</sup> A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you choose, you can make me **clean**.”<sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made **clean**!”<sup>42</sup> *Immediately the leprosy left him*, and he was made **clean**.<sup>43</sup> After sternly warning him he sent him away at once,<sup>44</sup> saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, *show yourself to the priest*, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What word, phrase or image grabs your attention?**
- **For Jesus, healing (purity) means a return of the individual and the community to God’s original intent. What do the notions of pure and impure mean to you? How do they intersect with your life? What we’re living?**
- **Who recognizes Jesus for who he really is? Who and how does Jesus recognize others in the text?**
- **How do you hear an invitation from the Spirit of God to speak, be, act or become in this word?**

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**It’s all Greek to Me!** The bible is written in three languages: The first testament is in Hebrew & Aramaic (a simplified form of Hebrew) and was later translated into Greek which we call the Septuagint. The New Testament is written in Koine Greek. It was a simplified version of classic Greek that was spoken throughout what became the Roman Empire during the time of the Greeks and the Romans. It was a universal language, similar to English in our modern world. It’s not necessary to read or speak Greek to understand the Bible, and yet at times there are riches to be unearthed in the meaning of words (as in today’s text) by seeking out the original meaning of a word. It’s easy to forget that words change in terms of meaning and use across languages, cultures and time. You can find tools to look up meanings of words online using sites such as <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/> which can easily walk you through word meanings and uses in scripture.

*came out of him | the fever left her | the leprosy left him:* the same language is used to describe the three healings and exorcisms. They’re presented a a similar state, that which God has intended (pure, healthy) and has been contaminated, twisted or spoiled.

**Clean** καθαίρτος - katharos meaning that which is is separated (purged), hence "clean" (pure) because unmixed (without undesirable elements); (figuratively) spiritually clean because purged (purified by God), i.e. free from the contaminating (soiling) influences of sin. (the antonym of the word is "unclean" – used to describe the spirit Mark 1:23, 28.

*Moved with pity*, Those afflicted with leprosy or other skin diseases were banished from society and public worship as per the codes of Leviticus 13 “The person who has the leprosy disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

*show yourself to the priest*, Jesus asks the former-leper to do what is required by the law as per Leviticus 14:1-32 “This shall be the ritual for the leprosy person at the time of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest; the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. If the disease is healed in the leprosy person, the priest shall command a sacrifice of one living clean bird... the priest shall sprinkle the healed person seven times with the blood of the sacrifice, then the priest shall pronounce him clean.”