

Listening and Talking . . . by Rev. Tom Cici

Do you realize that over two thousand years ago, it was unlawful and considered an unclean practice to heal people? But Jesus crossed such boundaries and healed people which helped lead to modern medicine. If you still wonder, “Is the risen Christ still around?” just look at all the healings.

Since the Spirit of Christ abides in all humanity allowing us to identify humanity as the Body of Christ, I believe true followers of Jesus Christ also responds lovingly to sick people. We find ways of driving out the illness without driving away the person. We drive out things like germs instead of casting out the person as unclean. And in our days of more advanced medicine, think of the change we have made in dealing with conditions such as Down syndrome and Alzheimer’s disease. We don’t automatically put these people away in fear. We find that persons with Down syndrome or Alzheimer’s become an important people in the community, who return love a hundred-fold.

Jesus began the practice of driving out the evil without casting out the person as unclean. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he cast out an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-28). What kind of unclean spirit was Jesus casting out? However we understand the possession of the man in this biblical story, it is the imposition of something alien and oppressive that Jesus cast out of him without doing him any harm. We get an important clue as to the nature of this alien invasion when the unclean spirit says: “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24).

We often think that Jesus told the unclean spirit to be silent because the spirit was correct, and Jesus didn’t want his true identity spread throughout the countryside. However, the term “Holy One of God” refers to Israel’s priesthood. One of the main jobs of the priest was to expel anybody who was “unclean.” Jesus silences the unclean spirit because the spirit is wrong. Jesus does not represent a priesthood who expels the “unclean.” Quite the opposite.

Jesus is expelling the collective attitude that the man is unclean when it is the crowd’s spirit that has invaded the man and declared him unclean. By casting out this spirit, Jesus makes the man clean so that he can rejoin the community. Any person was cast out of the synagogue and considered unclean if they were sick in any way, dirty, bleeding, had an immoral reputation, a child, or a foreigner.



Jesus is not healing an individual; he is healing a community. Jesus is giving the community an opportunity to be healed, and free to love, and welcome all God’s creation. For this to take place, the community must renounce the rivalry that had been imposed on one vulnerable person. Jesus is using his powerful authority to strengthen and liberate

all of Israel. The Gospel of Mark shows that Jesus' liberation of Israel includes judging the leadership both of the scribes (the teachers) and priests.

Today, those demons might include alcohol and drugs (even prescription drugs) which cause escapism and denial. Those demons might include out-of-control consumerism and debt. We might be held back (possessed) from true freedom by the rampant violence and sex all around us in our culture which in turn causes negativity, hatred, and anxiety-ridden fear. We are still possessed, as a society, by the demon of poverty which is caused by our own selfishness and rivalry.

As disciples of Christ, I believe Jesus Christ calls us to be healers, to stand against all the demons that possess us and keep us from freedom. The first step to being a healer involves the same issue that confronted Jesus on the first day of his ministry: to bring freedom and healing to others from the unholy spirits that society imposes upon us, but never at the cost of destroying or harming other people.

Everybody deserves to receive justice; everybody is love and is to be loved; and everybody is worthy of grace and mercy. It is in the sharing that we find each other and God and discover ourselves set free. Sharing our True Selves as humans united to God through the Holy Spirit of Christ connects all of us as one and takes seriously the reality of God's grace. At first this sharing may be painful, causing some noise and convulsions of spirit, but soon it is worth it, for we discover God's goodness and human joy.

Blessings as we serve together in the Resurrection of Christ.