Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“A new teaching with authority” (Mark 1:28).

1 Sam 1:9-20; Mark 1:21-28

In Mark, after Jesus calls his first disciples he immediately begins his public ministry. It is noteworthy that his first miracle is an exorcism in the synagogue in Capernaum. Nine verses earlier, Mark told us that after his baptism Jesus was “immediately driven by the Spirit into the wilderness” to be tempted by Satan. In the Bible, just as the Spirit is called an advocate (paraclete), so Satan is the biblical designate for an adversary. In other words, even before his public ministry begins, Jesus is thrust into a cosmic courtroom where the outcome will determine his own fate and the fate of the world.

Still in the throes of his baptism and the revelation that he is God’s Beloved Son, Jesus is immediately subjected to a soul-probing cross-examination by the cleverest of all tempters. We are back in the primordial days at Creation when the Serpent easily derailed paradise by telling Adam and Eve that they would be gods if they disobeyed their Creator. Satan will now try to deceive Jesus with the same crude temptations he used to seduce the Hebrews in the desert by offering them bread, miracles and idolatry.

Where Adam and Eve failed and the Hebrews succumbed, Jesus will survive by the power of the Holy Spirit and his mastery of the Scriptures. Satan will twist them to persuade Jesus that he can in fact fulfill God’s will and succeed as Messiah by

accepting Satan's help. Jesus rejects this path to glory and instead commits to the road of the Suffering Servant, descending into weakness and suffering to bring the world back to God with humility and love.

So, it is not surprising that Mark has Jesus enter the synagogue where a demoniac has found a home, undisturbed and undetected, for Satan has long ago seduced institutional religion to mask his purposes. But the victim shrieks at being discovered by Jesus, whose Holy Spirit displaces all counterfeit piety. Satan's first probe into the authenticity of Jesus returns a jolting shock into all the minions who are hiding among the possessed, including the self-satisfied and comfortable righteous people who have never encountered their own blind pride and habitual malevolence toward others.

Jesus' first miracle signals the end of the reign of Satan and the release of every victim held captive by evil. The reign of God is at hand, and proof of this is that every vestige of fear and paralysis, including illness, will fall before the advance of Jesus into the towns and villages. The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, cripples walk, lepers are cleansed, the possessed are reclaimed by God's love, sinners are restored by God's mercy. Mark will exult over this victory of love with a series of healing stories for the next few chapters of his Gospel. Jesus, the bridegroom, will have his honeymoon.

Then the doctors of the Law will arrive from Jerusalem to shore up the local authorities convinced that Jesus cannot be from God because he heals on the Sabbath. The experts will up their game by spreading the cheapest of all lies since Jesus met the Father of Lies in the desert. They will say that Jesus is in fact in league with the Prince of Darkness, who is empowering his miracles and gracious ways. This logical absurdity will typify the relentless campaign of hatred and lies that will track Jesus from Capernaum to his arrival in Jerusalem, where his death has already been a forgone and necessary conclusion to save the status quo.

Mark wastes no time in this new year in drawing us into the drama that will challenge our own lives at every turn in the weeks to come. The Gospel is the glass darkly where our own reflection will test us again and again until we begin to see the face of Jesus emerging within our desire to be the person God created us to be, the one we dream of. With Christmas barely behind us, we have already set a course for Easter.

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