Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said of Jesus, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul’” (Mark 3:22).

2 Sm 5:1-7, 10; Mark 3:22-30

With sinister yet faulty logic, the Jerusalem scribes accuse Jesus of driving out Satan by the power of Satan. These experts of the Law are so confounded by a hill country preacher that they accuse Jesus of being in league with Beelzebul, a particularly loathsome title for Satan, which meant “Lord of the Flies” or “Lord of Dung.”

The people, who found spirits everywhere and in everything, are first taken aback by the scribes' criticisms, but they can only rejoice in what they see happening all around them. Jesus has been making the rounds in Capernaum and outlying villages, lifting people from their sick beds, restoring sight, speech and hearing, recalling the disturbed to sanity and to their families. He is evidently the “Lord of Life” wherever he goes, yet these scholars see only buzzing flies, dung and death.

Jesus addresses the absurdity of the argument that evil was driving out evil. Their attacks show how threatened the local synagogue leaders and the inquisitors from Jerusalem were to witness Jesus demonstrating what religion itself should have been giving people -- God’s unconditional love and freedom. It was not lost on the crowds that Jesus had real authority compared to these so-called teachers.

A discernible shift has taken place. Some dark spell has been broken and its oppressive weight lifted from their shoulders. Joy relieves anxiety, and gratitude

flows into generosity as families reconcile and neighbors embrace. Jesus has bound up the strong man and taken possession of the house of humanity, where God now dwells again in the midst of his people. The reign of God is at hand.

This Gospel scene helps us recognize how the same oppressive spirits can gain mastery over our lives if we feed on fear and doubt, let naysayers and liars divide the world into them and us, if we override our natural compassion with suspicion and distrust. When these spells take hold, who can break them? On one occasion, Jesus tells his frustrated disciples when they fail to heal a possessed boy and restore him to his distraught father that some spirits can only be defeated by prayer (Mark 9: 25-29).

Prayer is the deep connection to the Holy Spirit that Jesus called upon to displace the spirit of Evil. The two spirits cannot coexist. Holiness drives out sin, life pushes back on death. Evil is a mystery, but its collective spell can be broken by the even more powerful mystery of unselfish love. Jesus calls us to confront and push back evil wherever we find it, confident that his grace is always sufficient.

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