

St Paul United Church of Christ
5312 Old Blue Rock Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247
Allen M. Fluent, Transitional Pastor
Order of Worship for Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 31, 2021

(As our congregation returns to holding worship in our building, we are conscious of the many people who will not be able to be physically present. Therefore, we will be continuing the practice of sending a worship bulletin to all who are on our mailing lists for email or hard copy. Those who will be worshipping from home and who have computer access will also be receiving a recorded version of the service that will be sent out by email on Sunday afternoon and also can be seen on our Facebook page. We welcome your participation in any way that is convenient for you, and we encourage you to share our worship service with any person you know who may appreciate receiving it.)

Morning Announcements and Prayer Requests

Prelude (recording begins)

Morning Praise: Psalm 111:1-3

Praise the Holy One our God!

I will give thanks to God with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Great are the works of God, studied by all who delight in them.

Full of honor and majesty is God's work, and God's righteousness endures forever.

Hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" # 496

***What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.***

***Refrain: Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; leaning, leaning,
leaning on the everlasting arms.***

***O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms. R***

***What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms. R***

Prayer for Reconciliation

God, we are beside ourselves with joy, because we know the grace with which our lives are favored. For Jesus came in perfect love to drive out the unclean spirits in our midst and heal us in the spirit of reconciliation. We confess to you our need to be

commanded by your love – to put aside indifference, jealousy and revenge, and the desire to obtain advantage over others – so that we may enter into the communion with you that brings peace to our souls and to the whole human fellowship. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn Response

“Spirit of the Living God”

#492

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me; Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me; Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

Spirit of the living God, move among us all; make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love;

Humble, caring, selfless, sharing, Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love.

Epistle Lesson:

2 Corinthians 5:13-21

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul speaks to us about the power of Jesus’ message to reconcile all who live in sinful misunderstanding of one another in a new creation created by the death of Christ because of our brokenness and Christ’s resurrection which lifts us up to new life in him.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

Lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures: Deuteronomy 18:15-18

When Jesus first appeared in Galilee with extraordinary wisdom and authority, those who were attracted to him may have seen in him a fulfillment of a prophecy spoken by Moses and recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. These are the words of that prophecy:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command."

Gospel Lesson:

Mark 1:21-28

And thus Jesus ministry began:

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 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." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Sermon:

In Capernaum, Jesus and his followers encounter a reclusive man who is said to be possessed by an unclean spirit. He seems an empty soul, isolated and reclusive. He is alienated from his neighbors; but, more than that, he seems lost even to himself. He can no longer speak for himself. When he does seem to speak, it is in the voice of the possessing spirits, that have emptied him of his humanity and taken over his identity.

Today, we would say that such a person is mentally ill, and we might wonder what traumatic experience or neurological anomaly might have made him so. The Gospel writer, however, gives us a clue to the diagnosis of this man's condition and the reason Jesus was able to effect a cure. He describes it as an issue of authority. Mark begins his story by telling how impressed the people were with Jesus' teachings. "He taught them as one having authority," they said, "and not as their scribes." And then, when Jesus commands the spirits to be silent and come out of the man, they are amazed, because even the spirits obey his command. So Mark reminds us of a central teaching of his Gospel: that Jesus has come, not only as a healer but also as a prophet like the one promised by Moses, who speaks the words that God commands.

The story about the possessed man in Capernaum does not tell us how it was that the man lost his mind, except that clearly he had put his mental effort to work in the service of demons, perhaps intentionally or perhaps unknowingly. The demons of our lives are not necessarily apparent to us, though Jesus and his early followers gave us some lists that are clear enough. The thing is, they often appeal to us, and seem less dangerous than they are. They're things like accumulating too much stuff, or putting safety ahead of care for others, or getting revenge, or not being too generous to strangers and foreigners, Jesus had lots of parables about demons like these.

Paradoxically, Jesus' followers often talked about losing their minds in a very different and much more positive way. St Paul, in his Second Letter to the Church at Corinth, spoke about religious ecstasy, literally being beside themselves and out of their minds, because of the great joy of knowing that God's truth alone commanded them. And as they put their minds to work figuring out how to share what they had with others, how to welcome any who had need, and how to resist what was wrong in the world without anger or hate, they grew each day more in touch with how full life could be.

What are the spirits that possess your soul?

Musical Interlude

Jake Rizer

Our Time of Prayer

Holy One our God, we celebrate the authority of Jesus Christ in our lives. We give thanks for your healing ministry among us and for your power to drive out the unclean spirits that lie within us. We rejoice that you have shown us the way out of the darkness of pridefulness and greed and into the light of your redeeming love.

May we who have seen your light be guided by its truth so that we may experience the blessings of a shared community of grace.

We pray for those in our congregation and among our circle of friends who have needs that are known among us – those suffering illness, those who are bereaved, those who struggle with loneliness or depression, and those whose future seems insecure. And we pray for those whose needs we do not know, and those we do not understand, in the faith that you understand us all.

May your gracious Spirit grant us peace as we work for the just resolution of differences among your people, so that the world we leave for those who come after us may finally achieve the heavenly Realm that has been promised from faith's beginning.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

"Community of Christ"

#615

*Community of Christ, who make the cross your own,
live out your creed and risk your life for God alone:
the God who wears your face, to whom all worlds belong,
whose children are of every race and every song.*

*Community of Christ, look past the church's door
and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street,
take towel and water, that you wash your neighbor's feet.*

*Community of Christ, through whom the word must sound –
cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round;
disarm the powers that war and all that can destroy,
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.*

*When menace melts away, so shall God's will be done,
the climate of the world be peace and Christ its sun;
our currency be love and kindness our law,
our food and faith be shared as one forevermore.*

Benediction

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Postlude