

*21They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24and 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." 25But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27They 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." 28At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.*

A merger, an acquisition, a change in ownership, in management - over and over and over again these past years all through business everything has been change - divisions sold, new bosses, a new name.

As an outsider looking on, what difference is it if a plant has the name of B. F. Goodrich, or Geon. But some of you have watched your whole life change - early retirement, layoff, new responsibilities, new policies.

Change brings speculation. What will this mean for me? Will new management be a blessing or a curse for me? Will this be a beginning or an end for me?

Those of you who have been through such changes will understand the questions asked by the unclean spirit in today's gospel.

Jesus entered the synagogue. In that place reserved for worshipping God was an unclean spirit. Some say we should think of this as a mental illness that controlled a man. Some say we should think of this spirit as possession by a demon. However we understand it, the spirit recognized a change coming.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?"

Until that moment the unclean spirit was comfortable. People had gotten used to the spirit. No one had chased this man out of the synagogue. Everyone had adjusted. Now Jesus had entered to upset everything.

Have you come to destroy us?

We are never told who that us is. There is one spirit here, in the next sentence it speaks of itself as I. So who is us?

When the Holy one of God comes into the world, who does he come to destroy? Who would you destroy?

Drug dealers, murders, lazy workers or supervisors?

Gossippers, troublemakers?

Liars, adulterers, children with no respect for their elders?

People of other religions, or races?

Me?

You?

When the Holy One of God comes into the world, who does he come to destroy?

When management changes, every worker thinks he deserves to stay on. No one is perfect each would say, but I am better than most of the rest. Things have been all right up until now. I must be good enough.

“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 out with a loud voice, came out of him.

The unclean spirit lost his place in the man, in the synagogue, in the world. He made some racket, he tried to hang on but Jesus drove him out.

This was the first public engagement between Jesus and all that is opposed to God that Mark reports. Others will follow.

The last public engagement will not take place in a synagogue, but on a hill named Golgotha - the place of the skull. In that battle Jesus will be the one crying out with a loud voice, Jesus spirit will go out of him. To human eyes it will seem that Jesus is destroyed.

Does it mean that the old management will remain, and things will be forever as they are? Was God's attempt to claim the world by sending God's own Son a lost cause, a failure? Does Satan win – a few of his soldiers lost but the Holy one of God destroyed?

Right now all of this is just plain confusing and you are all waiting for me to make some sense of it all. What's the point, pastor, you are saying to yourself?

Maybe this sermon is getting just as confusing as the whole question of evil in your life and mine. When we think about the whole world and nations and empires, it is easy to know that Hitler and Stalin were evil. Idi Amin, Sadam Husein.

But when the Holy one of God walks through the door of my life and your life, what does he come to destroy? What will be left of me if Jesus is the new management? Must greed

come out of me, and resentment, or the feeling that life ought to be fun for me? Do these belong to God, or to an unclean spirit in me?

We think the story should always be just the way it was in that synagogue. Jesus enters your life, there is some convulsing, maybe a cry or two, and evil will be gone.

But no. Every day of your living and breathing Jesus and evil are locked in a struggle over you.

Shall we give up because the way is not easy? Shall we make peace with the unclean spirits that fill us with judging hearts, and resentment, and selfishness? Shall we pretend that evil is only out there, in others, but never in here, in me?

Jesus hopes not.

For he knows that you belong to him. When you believe and trust in him, you are a Holy One of God. The very Jesus whom Satan drove out on the cross, claims your days and deeds with a Holy Spirit and the battle goes on. Love and forgiveness and peace flow from God through you to put the world under new management.

God has shown us what that new management will mean. A new heaven and a new earth, resurrection beyond death, the end of all crying and tears. When God has God's way, there will be a great convulsing and evil will be no more. And God will be worshipped by all who live with him forever.