

*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.*

Let's call him Freddie. If I remember right that was the name of the young man who has fallen in love with Eliza Dolittle. He's the one who stands outside through rain and sunshine, day and night waiting to just catch a glimpse of his beloved. He sings, "On the Street Where You Live." Innocent. Pure. Sincere.

Freddie. The younger set here makes another association with that name. Though I've never seen the movie or the sequels I heard somewhere that Freddie Krugger is the name of the evil one in Friday the 13th.

Yes, let's call him Freddie. Mark never told us his name. Freddie will do.

Jesus went to a synagogue, taught with authority, the people were astounded.

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit, demon possessed. Freddie, there in the synagogue, the place where people gathered to be taught of God, to that very place Freddie was drawn. This is the Friday the 13th Freddie, face to face with Jesus.

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

The unclean spirit and Freddie the person were separated. Evil no longer dominated this human being. Jesus destroyed the evil but saved the person.

All this happened in a synagogue, the place of teaching of God, the place of singing praises to God.

And it happened not just once but later in this first chapter of Mark we read: And Jesus went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. In town after town Jesus encountered people possessed by evil in the very place where God was worshipped.

A place like this.

The last thing that someone expects when they come into a place like this is Freddie of Friday the 13th. Here there are to be only the Freddies of My Fair Lady, full of pure love. Yet if all the stories about churches and what has happened in churches were told, how many of the stories would be of people hurting people - evil, not good.

Let me tell you how it happened to me:

My story begins with a dream that I had of showing people all the good things that happen through the work of LAOS, the Lutheran Agencies in Cleveland. For a number of years I have been on the LAOS board. I have encouraged people to take the Trolley tour which each October takes people from the churches to the very places where all sorts of good is being done. This year I volunteered to plan the tour.

I volunteered because I knew that I could really make a difference. In the past on this tour people talked about the help that others were receiving. My hope was to no longer have the givers of help talk, but as much as possible to let the receivers of the help tell their stories.

And so with another member of the board I planned the tour. I timed the routes, I talked to the presenters, I pushed through resistance to change.

Finally the day of the tour dawned, a beautiful sunny, blessed-by-God day. And it was; that whole day and tour was blessed by God. People told their stories and every heart was warmed. Ask Karen Lecorchick, or Howard or Marilyn Pressnell. These were stories of what God is doing. The only problem with the day is that there just wasn't enough time.

Our last stop was at the parish house next to Trinity Lutheran on West 30th. Here was housed the after school program for at risk youth. Upstairs were the computers and art programs, programs intended to keep these kids in school, for these were the kids just on the verge of being lost. Downstairs we walked through a room where a number of black teenage boys were lifting weights, then into a gym that the church had added to the house decades ago. I passed through that room and brushed shoulders with a number of the kids time and again as I wrapped up the end of the tour.

Then all was ended and home I went.

And off to a meeting that night. Funny, I forgot my watch.

The next morning when I readied myself for work, I looked for my watch. Actually it was my father's watch, a Rolex given to him to honor forty years of work. The watch was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly I thought about the close quarters I had been in, and the teenagers in those close quarters with me. I felt betrayed, and foolish. I had been there to help them. Someone had lifted my watch.

I knew that that goes with the territory, that helping is not without cost.

But I had a dilemma. If I reported my watch stolen so that my insurance would pay for it, they would ask me where it was stolen, and the police would be brought in. These teenagers that we were trying to help would be grilled. No good would come of it. The program might be destroyed.

Still someone had stolen my watch.

At supper that evening I told Katie all about what had happened. She was very skeptical of my conclusions. How did I know that they had stolen my watch? Was this just another case of the old, distrusting the young, whites distrusting blacks, the rich distrusting the poor.

But what else could have happened?

Katie's reaction bothered me. Or more accurately my reaction bothered me. My readiness to accuse did not fit with what I say I believe. I brooded.

Then I did something I still don't quite understand. I went out into the garage and opened the garbage sack from the day before and dug through the coffee grounds and used napkins and found this lying there in the bottom. I thanked God. Not for the watch, but for my never making the call that would have accused.

In all of my life I have never thrown my watch away before. Maybe I was distracted, had some trash in my hand as I was removing my watch. I only know that right in the midst of my seeking to do a great good, I came so very close to doing a great evil.

Jesus encountered the demons in the synagogues. You and I should pay attention to that. The battle between good and evil is not just out there in the world and among drug dealers and thieves. The battle between good and evil is waged here, in our midst -in our very selves.

Jesus has power to cast out the demons. His teaching has authority to cast out the demons. His teaching may come from my mouth, or from Katie's mouth or from yours, for the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in all of you. But other spirits are in us also.

That is why we need to cling to God's word and be fed and nourished at the table of our Lord. God is fighting for us, but evil wants us also. We need what God gives every day. We need to hear the words of one another.

Hollywood says there are two different Freddie's. But Christ says there are people to be saved, all people to be saved. Christ died for your sins, for the sins of all. Amen.