

**Title: “Destroyed to be Remade”**

**Series: Life Transformation**

**Scripture: Mark 1:21-28**

**Date Used: February 12, 2023**

**Focus: “The unclean spirit cried out.... ‘Have you come to destroy us?’ We don’t often think of Christ as a destroyer, but indeed that is what he was. He came to destroy the un-God-like parts of our lives so that we can be remade in God’s image.**

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During my junior year of college at Mount Union the old science building was taken down. It had served the college for many years, but it was outdated and not in the best condition, so the college trustees decided it was time for the old building to be demolished. Since the old Hartshorn Science Building was connected to another building the college wanted to keep, they had to take the building with a wrecking ball.

A crowd gathered on the sidewalk as the wrecking ball moved into place. The boom on the truck started to move back and forth as the ball gathered momentum and it hit the building with a solid thud. Nothing happened. The wrecking ball was pulled back and launched into the old science building once again. Again, nothing happened. By now the crowd was chuckling a little bit wondering if the building may not in fact be the best constructed buildings on campus. But finally, after about the fourth or fifth blow, the building started to crumble. The old Hartshorn Building came down and within a year, a new state of the art science building stood in its place.

Like that old science building, there are parts of our lives that need to be crumbled, parts of who and what we are that we know God does not want us to continue to hold onto. There are pieces of our personality that we continue to hang onto that are potentially harmful to ourselves and harmful to others. And when it comes to letting those parts go, we can be about as resilient as that old science building on the Mount Union campus. We don’t let them crumble easily. We might even try to fight off or remain oblivious to the Spirit of God that seeks to crumble us.

Jesus is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum and Mark records that the crowd was astounded by his teaching. He taught them as someone having authority.

Now there was a man in the synagogue that day who was possessed by an unclean spirit, he was possessed by a demon. Mark is saying that this man who was created in the image of God had been taken over by an outside force. The life force that God placed within him had been hijacked. His life was under the control of a force that sought to harm him and use him to harm others.

When Jesus, who has just defeated the power of Satan in the wilderness, is recognized by this unclean spirit, the unclean spirit knows its days were numbered. And the demon cries out when it sees Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus? Have you come to destroy us?”

Through his actions, Jesus demonstrates that indeed, he has come to destroy that which is not of God, that which has taken over what belongs to God. He has come to restore to God what belongs to God. Jesus has been given the authority and the power to do away with the ungodly and the un-god-like parts within God's people.

Now it's rather interesting that most of the people in the synagogue simply view Jesus as a new teacher with authority. And they are amazed at how the unclean spirits obey him. But these spectators fail to see Jesus for who he really is. It is only the unclean spirit that knows Jesus' true identity. In the narrative it is only the unclean spirit that affirms what we learned about Jesus at his baptism - that he is the Holy One of God, that the Spirit of God has come to dwell within him. And as the Anointed One of God, he has come to reclaim who and what belongs to God. Yet, it is only the unclean spirit that realizes Jesus' mission is to destroy the ungodly which has hijacked the godly.

Why is that?

I wonder why it is that the good religious folks of Capernaum only see Jesus as a teacher that has been given the power to cast our demons and they fail to see him as anything more than that. But this unclean spirit, this enemy of God, realizes who he's facing. This demon knows it's up against the Son of God.

I think it has to do with our nature. There is something about us, that it is only when we are completely broken that we are the most receptive to change. While there may be parts of our lives that we feel are not what God want them to be we feel that as long as we can hold those parts of who we are in check, as long as those parts do not dominate who we are, we are willing to put up with them. And by doing so, we keep God at bay. We think we can handle it. And by doing so, we deny how serious the problem really is.

There is also another part of us that doesn't want to risk the embarrassment of making others aware of something we are struggling with. We want to maintain the perception that we have it all together. We want to maintain the illusion that we can manage our lives on our own.

Then there is that other piece to the equation. Pleasure is often associated with those parts in our lives that are most estranged from God. It could be pleasure that comes from sexual fantasy, or from an object that we covet, or the acquisition of great wealth or coming into a position of power.

And we have this tendency to speak about our faith in a very intellectual way. We can easily say that we need Christ in our lives. But when it really comes down to letting Christ into those areas of our lives that we need him to enter, like the unclean spirit Jesus encounters we say, "What have you to do with me, Jesus. Leave me alone."

The religious folks of Capernaum held Christ at bay by reducing Jesus to nothing more than a rabbi with authority. They view him as a powerful guy that can cast out demons.

But they don't begin to consider what he can do for their lives. They failed to consider that if Jesus can transform the life of one who was possessed by a demon.

Many years ago, I had the occasion to watch portions of an interview Larry King had with the Rev. Ted Haggard. As you probably remember, Haggard, this one time very prominent evangelical leader who founded the New Life Church in Colorado Springs and was also the national president of the National Association of Evangelicals, was in the news far more than he wanted to be. A couple of years before his interview with Larry King, a male prostitute had come forward and said that Haggard had hired him on numerous occasions.

After initially denying the allegations, Haggard finally admitted that some of what his accuser had said was in fact true. In a letter to the congregation of New Life Church Haggard wrote (and listen to how he phrased this), "There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it my entire adult life."

He was aware of this destructive piece within him. In his mind he knew that Jesus could transform that piece of his life. He knew that Jesus had the power to destroy it. But I sense that he, just like the religious folks in Capernaum, wouldn't let Jesus get close to that piece of his life for reasons we will probably never completely understand.

What would have happened if before anything had happened Haggard had had a close group of friends he could have confided in and said, "I don't know why, but I am really struggling with something of my life. There is a dark piece within me that needs to be transformed. I am really being drawn to express this dark part of myself and I need your help. As part of the fellowship of Christ help me so that I not only don't do that, but that I actually find Christ's healing for this part of my life."

The very nature of life is that we who were created in the image of God have had parts of our lives that have been hijacked by that which is not of God. There are parts of who we are that are more invested in our own destruction and in the destruction of others than with promoting God's purpose of spiritual health, peace, and wholeness.

Do you ever feel like there are parts of who you are that really don't reflect what the Creator intended for your life? Are there parts of who you are that you know God did not create to be a part of you, yet they are still present within you?

When I look at myself, and I mean when I really take a deep look at the person that I am, I see parts of myself that I know God did not put there; parts of who I am that I know God does not want there. I know there are parts within me that when they are confronted with the presence of Christ they cry out, "Have you come to destroy us?"

If I listen closely, I can hear Jesus reply, "Yes, I have come to destroy that part in you so that that part of you can be restored to the image of the One in which you were created!"

The parts of our lives that need Christ's restoring power will be different for each of us. Some people have a desire for power. Their minds are always drifting into fantasies when they are in a position of power over others. Others have a desire for great wealth. For others it is some deeply seated anger issues. For some, it will be something or someone they lust after.

The wounded parts of our lives, those ungodly parts of our lives are different for each of us. But, when we recognize these parts within ourselves, instead of keeping Christ at arms-length we can invite the One who at the command of his voice can cast out the ungodly parts of our lives, to continue his life transforming work within us.

This is not easy to do on our own. It is best done in community with other believers, sometimes even believers with a similar issue. A friend of mine whose family had had financial struggles for many years always fantasized about being financially sound. He dreamed about winning the big pay out at the casino, making a bundle in a short time on an investment. He had dreams of financial security.... He could have done it by using slower means and joined one of those programs where they show you how to get out of debt and find financial freedom. But he wanted nothing to do with that. He wanted to get rich quick.

There was a part of him that realized this dream was crazy. There was a part of him that knew it was not acceptable and so he kept his activities secret. Neither his wife, nor anyone else in his family knew about it. He had convinced himself that this was acceptable to do. After all it was his paycheck, and he was only going to do something he knew would be beneficial to his wife and children. The money wouldn't go missing from the family's account because it would only be a few days until there would be a great return on his investment.

So, he gambled online, and he also made some questionable high-risk investment and they both failed.

After speaking with me about this issue, he attended Gambler's Anonymous meetings for a short time. If he had stuck with it, I imagine they could have helped him understand that broken part in his life for what it was and helped him find the restoration that Christ offers.

While he knew it was harming him and his relationship with his wife, he struggled to let that broken piece of his life experience the life transforming power of Christ. Even when he was part of a community where there were numerous people that had the same story he had, they had experienced Christ's transforming power for that part of their lives, he fought off the Christ who wanted to transform that part of his life and restore it to God's image.

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

He answers us by saying, “Yes. I have come to destroy those broken parts in your life. I have come to take them away so the image of God the Creator can be restored within you.”

That is what he offers to us today. He offers us God’s desire, God’s help, the help of Christian community to destroy parts of us and to rebuild us – to melt us and remold us in God’s image.