

GOSPEL MESSAGE

January 31, 2021

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Could He Be the Only One?

Who: Jesus, disciples, observant go-to-worship folks honoring the sabbath. And, yes, a man with an unclean spirit. (Could he be the only such soul in the congregation?)

What: Reading holy words, the domain of scribes and scholars, and a shocking teaching given “with authority.”

Where: In the synagogue.

When: On the sabbath.

Who is this one who cried out in the congregation? Was he a scared thief creeping from his hiding place? A lanky kid exhausted from bawling outside locked doors? An old man gasping beneath piles of ill-gotten wealth? A young woman cursing heaven by day and hell by night for reasons no one dares to name? A stumbling fugitive worn down by a lifetime of running? A robust profiteer, master of deception? An unjust judge solemnly wearing a robe woven from threads of secret favors? A miser in a mansion perched above slums? A hoarder of vengeance nursing metastasized hatreds? Have you seen, met, or known any of these among the congregation?

The one with an unclean spirit cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” (Mark 1:24). Jesus silences the unclean spirit. But Jesus will not be the destroyer. The crucified one does not crucify. He does not build and fill prisons; he sets free. He does not shun, avoid, and send away; he calls the accursed to himself. He does not condemn the sinner; he rescues and saves.

Yes, they in the synagogue that day and we in the church this day are amazed. Jesus’ teaching with authority contradicts all the rules that anchor us to a spirit of despair. Good news, indeed.

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