

# "Exorcizing Demons"

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 & Mark 1:21-28

January 29, 2006

I found it really interesting to read an article this week about an observation that Alexander Solzhenitsyn made about how Russian authorities controlled the church in Russia in his book entitled, The First Circle. He writes: **"No one stops them from ringing their bells; they can break communion bread anyway they please. They can have their processions with the cross. But they will in no way allow them to have any connection with social or civic affairs."** The church was allowed to go through the motions; it could have a presence, but it dare not have an influence - it did not dare to be relevant..

**Do you find the church to be relevant? I have often found myself wondering why many people just do not take the Bible and God as seriously as I think they might or should. But sometimes it seems pretty clear to me why such is the case. It seems understandable that some would not take the Bible very seriously when we come to times like today when we gather to hear this living word of God and encounter admonitions against eating food that has been sacrificed to idols and Jesus in conversation with demons before casting them out of the man whom they had been possessing. It would seem to me to be understandable if many heard these reading and simply tuned out and start to think about the 'real pressing issues' of their lives.**

**Do you find it all a bit irrelevant or unreal? Do you often hear the Word of God think that it has nothing to do with your life. It might be really easy to think that very thought today - - - but I would like to suggest to you that such is far from the truth today.**

**We hear the Apostle Paul talking about 'food that has been sacrificed to idols' and think that the text is lost in a more superstitious time. But in fact what Paul is really talking about is how we care for and encourage the faith of others. We can think that we know a lot of thing but what we are called to remember that it is in our loving relationship to others that we grow - a very relevant and helpful word for us. — We hear the Gospel text speak of Jesus casting out 'demons' and our minds might be drawn to all kinds of different 'Hollywood' images of frightening apparitions of non-human beings that 'go bump in the night' and are out to destroy. From horror movies like 'The Exorcist' to comedies like 'Ghostbusters 2' we have had our minds filled with the images. We add to that many portrayals of vampires and unreal and non-human beings that are held before us for entertainment value and we can easily be filled with a confusing mishmash of images when Jesus starts talking to the 'demons'. Irrelevant to your life - right??? Well, no! Not if we understand that the text is not so much about the demons that possess us but about the power and authority of God that is able to reach into the darkest corners of our**

**live and sweep them clean.**

**So, Let's talk about 'food offered to idols' and 'exorcizing demons'. Let's start with the demons. I am sure that there could be hundreds of stories shared and quite a variety of understanding expressed by the people in this room and perhaps an even great variety if we were to pole the whole community. In Biblical time demons were blamed for a great many things and often we have tried to explain it all away by connecting the Biblical stories with modern scientific and medical understandings. It is not my intent to discount or justify either the historic view held by people in the time of Jesus nor the modern views often espoused. Rather, I want to simply approach this text from one specific perspective that I hope will lead us to the authority of Jesus.**

**Kathleen Norris, author of a fine book entitled "Dakota" and other materials wrote about her demons at one point. She said' "When I think of the demons I need to exorcize, I have to look inward, to my heart and soul. Anger is my best demon, useful whenever I have to go into a Woman Warrior mode, harmful when I use it to gratify myself, either in self-justification, or to deny my fears. My husband, who has a much sweeter nature than I, once told me that my mean streak grieved him, not just because of the pain it cause him but because it was doing me harm." What are your best demons? To name them for what they are and how they bring suffering, is half the battle.**

**Have you ever thought of these Biblical images of demons in such a way? Certainly something like anger can truly haunt us - possess us – destroy us. Can we understand that we are possessed by many such demons - demons that darken and destroy our live - demons that come into our lives through countless means - demons that leave us paralyzed. If we can understand only this - never mind what other images the word demons conjure up - at least for me, my attention is quickly recaptured because those 'demons' are very real in my life and in the lives of many I know. What are your demons? It would be hard for me to imagine that anyone of us is not possessed if I begin to think of demons in this way. It may not be anger for you - - - but lets begin to make a list. Add to anger things like, greed, pride, guilt, lust, vengeance, mean spiritedness, hatred, discontentedness, selfishness, fear, macho fever, jealousy, drugs, need for attention, ..... etc.. Do demons haunt you? Do they 'possess' you?**

**It is remarkable to me to see the reactions of those who witnessed Jesus casting out the demons. They are not surprised by the demons, they are surprised by the authority of Jesus. And I believe that is one of our real problems today. Too often we just are not really impressed with the authority of Jesus - we really do not believe that Jesus has the full authority or power to cast out our demons.**

**We were talking at our confirmation class this past Wednesday about our belief in the power of God to forgive sins. Everyone wants to say that they believe that God forgives sins. But when it comes to those 'really big sins' those things that we really**

**know that we messed up on, too often we ask for Gods forgiveness but do not accept it because we refuse to let go of the guilt that possessed us with the sin. And if the demon of guilt continues always to possess us - we can not live the abundant life God wants for us. Does Jesus have the power and authority to cast out your demon? I will tell you, with the Bible, I believe He does!**

**I wish there was time to talk about the issue of food offered to idols - what they are in our world today - and the whole message of living a life of love in relation to others in our community. I think it is really the second part of our discussion on demons. When God forgives and sets us free - that new freedom must be reflected in how we relate to one another. We can live thinking that we have everything all figured out - our we can live as though what we really understand is that God has set us free. And so He has!**

**AMEN**