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## *The Crazyes Again*

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**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Fourth Sunday after The Epiphany**

*Just then, there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?... I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Mark 1.23-24*

I have served five churches in my ordained life, and it never fails. In every place I have ever ministered in, just when things are beginning to go right, the crazy people show up.

Just when I am having a delightful conversation, some person interrupts with a crazy point. Just when the committee has reached a spectacular decision, the crazy person jumps up to speak. Just when it looks like the entire congregation is happy, the crazyes show up angry and upset.

It's the same way in other institutions besides churches. In our businesses, for instance. We ask ourselves, "How in the world did that crazy person get into this organization?" We even find usually reasonable people suddenly acting crazily. It happens in our families. We even ask our lovers, "Where did that crazy comment come from?"

A lot of folks give up on organizations because too many crazy people are there. A lot of folks have stopped attending church because too many crazy people are there. We go to church to hear some word of comfort, some warm lesson of love; and instead, we hear some crazy person hollering at us.

Well, I think the same thing happened to Jesus. Just when he was starting his ministry. Just when things were starting to go right for him.

It happened like this, according to the opening chapter of the Gospel of Mark, just twenty-three verses into the whole book. Right after he had gathered his most trustworthy disciples, he began his public ministry by going to the synagogue to teach. The people were duly astounded and impressed.

But just as soon as he began that ministry, the crazyes showed up. Actually, they go by a number of different names. But in every gospel about Jesus, there appear people who are possessed by things. In today's gospel, Mark chapter one says that a man with an unclean spirit appeared in the synagogue, hollering, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth! I know who you are, the Holy One of God!" The Bible sometimes calls these people "possessed by a demon;" or it says they have an unclean spirit.

Ever since the first century, we Christians have struggled to define just what these unclean spirits, or persons under possession, are. Some have ventured to say that these diseases were first century attempt to define mental illness. Others have said that some supernatural power was at work, or that we should not define away demonic possession.

Whatever way we define these "unclean" spirits, or these types of possession, the gospel of Jesus Christ compels us to deal with them. Jesus might rather have talked about something else, maybe the hopes of his new ministry; but, instead, he was faced immediately by a man with an unclean spirit. Even if today we'd rather talk about something else, there is a story here about a man possessed with an unclean spirit.

Yes, there are people today, right in our churches, who are possessed. There are people in every healthy church who are, somehow, not quite right, who seem not to fit in, either at church or in society around us. They are not raving lunatics; they are not drooling from the mouth. Neither are they in need of serious institutionalization. But they are possessed by things.

A creative counselor might conclude that they are obsessed, or controlled by other spirits, such as loneliness itself, or possessed by anger, or possessed by deep dissatisfaction, or hurt, or driven by insecurity. They are fighting severe internal battles which we just cannot see, at first glance, from the outside.

Sometimes we call them crazy. Often, they are. If the moment is right, and we are with other people we trust, we will roll our eyes when mention is made of them. At other times, we become impatient with them.

You know what? Churches attract crazy people.

Go by most any church during the weekdays, in case you do not see it on a proper Sunday. On any given day in church, we deal with craziness. It's mostly harmless, of course. Some people are imbalanced. Some are angry. Almost always, people are lonely who are drawn to this place. Almost always, they get in the way of "agendas" and "proper business practices."

But, friends, let me say that this phenomenon is not a bad thing. It might be the sign of a healthy church. It might be a sign of a healthy church that it attracts crazy people. Look at the gospels themselves for confirmation. Look at Jesus' ministry itself. The first people to gather around Jesus in the Bible—that is, after he has called the disciples—the first people who are drawn to Jesus and fascinated by him, are the crazies, the people with unclean spirits, the folks seemingly possessed by demons.

How should the church respond? We have several choices. First, we could regret that fact. We could complain and lament. Or, secondly, we could pretend such folks do not exist. We could work around them. Or, third, like many diseased churches, we could bend to their every wish; we could let them guide us; we could become possessed as they are possessed.

But the Church fails in our mission if we let ourselves be taken captive by the possessed. Again, there are churches who do. They fret and worry about the folks with the loudest voices, who always ask the crazy question, or who are always yelling out like the man did to Jesus: "What have you to do with us? Have you come to destroy us?"

Jesus does an interesting thing with the folks who are crazy. He neither ignores them nor becomes impatient with them. And he certainly does not allow himself to be taken captive by them. He speaks the truth with them. He ministers freedom to them.

Real ministry to the possessed does not mean bending, and being shaped by their agendas, or trying to answer their boundless needs, or trying to answer their boundless complaining. Ministry to the possessed, means speaking a truth that comes from beyond this earthly realm. Ministry means being confident in the love and power which has brought us all to this church in the first place.

"Be silent, and come out of him," Jesus said to the man possessed by an unclean spirit. "And," the Gospel of Mark says, "the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed."

Yes, this is the powerful ministry of Jesus. Jesus meets the disease and possession of this world and delivers us from that possession.

*Us.* In fact, Jesus delivers *us*.

It is *we* who are the crazies. Why were we, any of us, first attracted to Jesus? Because we were lonely and possessed by things! Can we express our need for Jesus in any other way, except out of our own loneliness or possession?

The first truth is that we are all possessed at some point, at some level of our lives-especially those of us who call other people "crazy." Each of us has some bondage which keeps us away from freedom and release, which keeps us from enjoying life and the world and each other, in the way God has designed for us. Each of us can be driven crazy by a sense of being possessed by something not quite right.

It's why each of us comes to Jesus, in our own clumsy and sometimes frightening ways. We are all the crazies. We are all here. We, too, need that first ministry of Jesus.

The healthy Church is where each of us can bring our craziness face to face with Jesus. The healthy Church is where each of us can bring our madness to the love and holiness of Jesus.

The healthy Church will always have some illness, even some craziness, inside it. Just like our own bodies. The science of pathology teaches us that, as healthy as each of our bodies is today, every one of our physical bodies has various viruses and bacteria inside. If some of those viruses were to have their way with us, we would die. But our bodies fend off illnesses so that we actually become stronger. Our bodies never are completely rid of those viruses, but our total health actually needs them.

There is always some disease in us, and there is always some dis-ease in our communities. Just like there was in the community of Jesus.

It is the ministry of Jesus to heal, over and over again. Jesus heals us, over and over again. He needs only say the truth, speak the word. That word is a truth that goes beyond what most of think is teaching. Jesus' teaching is not mere mental exercise, not learning a bunch of clever facts, not like the "scribes," the Bible says. "Knowledge puffs up; but love builds up," Saint Paul would say later to the Corinthians. The people in the first century were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it had a deep authority, the authority to speak to their deepest needs and even to their most unclean possessions. Jesus had the authority of love.

And Jesus still speaks. He speaks to the crazies who will always show up around him. He speaks to the crazies who show up around us. He speaks to the crazy which is inside each of us. Today, we are face to face with the holiness of God, the truth of Jesus Christ. That holiness, that love, sets us free.

AMEN.

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