

Sermon: February 1, 2009
“Oh, those unclean spirits”

I've been thinking about the gospel lesson for this morning. Back then ---- they didn't understand the "human mind" like we do today. Hey ... maybe they were better off!!

Their world was pretty basic. Evil exists because of the devil.

And ... if someone is sick or mean or un-balanced ... well, it's because they are "possessed by a demon."

I don't understand myself half the time ... let alone anyone else. It seems like ... in our crazy world ... when someone goes "amuck" ... well, we have a name for it, a reason for it, even an excuse for it.

I'm thinking about life this morning ... as I walk our two dogs. Ah ... walking the dogs ... one of the few things in this world I do right!! I make coffee ... I get this right most of the time (if you like strong coffee). I pick the newspaper up from the driveway ... and see the headline of today's "Southtown" ----- 5 crosses and these names: Rhoda, Connie, Carrie, Sarah, and Jeni.

It will be a year ago tomorrow that these ladies were murdered in the Lane Bryant store in Tinley Park.

These words are on the front page: "*5 lives forever tied together.*"

It should read ----- 1000's of lives forever tied together. Why? ... because "we are them" ... and "they are us."

We are in this together. Their loss and pain is our loss and pain.

The bad news doesn't end here. There is the elderly couple murdered in Country Club Hills ... the young lady and her daughter dying in a fire ---- deliberately set on Chicago's south side. Then a bit of good news: Jennifer Hudson is singing the national anthem before the Super Bowl her first public appearance since the tragic murders of her mom, brother, and nephew.

There are many "unclean spirits" out there. Spirits who work against the very goodness of life. Spirits who "take down" ... and don't care about "building up." Spirits who destroy, instead of planting the seeds of new life. Spirits who are fueled by negativity and selfishness, and who look for power in the human weaknesses of others. Spirits who are free to grow in a world where selfishness is becoming more common than giving back to the common-good.

Jesus meets a man in a synagogue ... supposedly "possessed by a demon."

This demon talks to Jesus and even recognizes him. So, what does Jesus do???? --- he talks back ... he fights back. And before you know it ... the demon is gone ... the demon runs away. This is good stuff!!

In the first lesson ... Moses tells his people: "One day ... the Lord will raise up for you a prophet ... and you will heed this prophet's voice!!"

Jesus is such a prophet. He gets in the face of evil spirits ---- "Get out of here ... there is no room for you in this place!!"

Who are the prophets today?

Who will stand up to those who refuse to find common ground and refuse to look for the goodness-of-spirit we so desperately need in bringing us together?? Who is going to stand up for what is right? ... and just? ... and decent? ...and noble? Who will challenge the selfish and the self-centered? ... the bullies and all those who forget from whom and from whence we come??

You don't have to be a senator ... or a president ... or someone famous ... or a governor ... or a bishop. We need prophets on playgrounds, in nursing homes, on little league fields, in music rooms, in churches and funeral homes, in realtors offices and state buildings downtown.

My guess is ----- each of us, on occasion, has "evil spirits" ... "demons" lurking inside of us.

Each of us, on occasion, has acted out of anger or hatred or selfishness & greed.

But somehow ... by the grace of God ... there is a voice:
“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful. Love never rejoices in what is evil or wrong ... but rejoices only in what is true and good.”

JESUS HAS ONE WEAPON ... *it's called love.*

Not cheap love ... or easy love ... it often has to be TOUGH LOVE.

Love takes many shapes and forms ... love has many languages ... love comes with many faces.

When you know, in your heart ----- you are loved, not only by a “higher power” ... but also by a whole bunch of human-goofs who care about you ... yes, when you feel, know, and believe in the power of love

THEN YOU NEVER HAVE TO BRING ANYONE ELSE DOWN.

You build others up ... you nourish them ... you give them hope ... you teach others what is right.

We've probably all heard about the basketball game between two high school girls' teams.

The final score ---- 100 to 0.

This story has caused me to reflect. Especially when it comes to playing sports ... I have gone through some times when I have been ridiculously competitive. All I cared about was winning.

COMPETITION ---- it can be a gift. When someone doubts you ... when you are fighting cancer ... when you are battling to survive ... competition is your best medicine.

But there is a “demonic” side to competition. When we forget about just doing our best ... and we cross the line ----- trying to humiliate and destroy someone else's spirit and self-esteem.

I'm sure each of us has “defining moments” in which we learn what's important and what's not.

My little league team ---- some 20 years ago. I'm the coach ... our team isn't all that good.

It's the last inning ... we are already behind 15 – 0. I have no other pitchers left ... so, I bring in our son Aaron.

He's young ... hasn't pitched much ... but he's got a lot of fire and spirit.

Our catcher? ... well, it's the end of the game ... he is new ... doesn't “catch” very well.

The other team has the bases loaded. They've got the game in the bag ... but ----- their coach has the kids on base *steal home 3 times in a row!!!! ... 3 times!!*

It's now 18 to 0 ... and my son has thrown only 3 pitches!!

Demons begin to grow in my soul. I look at the other coach with “unclean” thoughts in my heart.

Why are you doing this? ... how many more runs do you need?

I look into the eyes of the kids on my team ----- I can feel the pain.

We needed a prophet ... someone to tap this meat-ball on the shoulder and say ---- “Don't do this ... the kids don't need or deserve to be beaten this badly!!”

Last week ... in a school gym ... a prophet needed to stand up ---- a parent? ... one of the players? ... a principal or dean????

A simple tap on the shoulder ----- “enough is enough” ... “the pride and spirit of these kids is at stake!!”

In gymnasiums and concert halls ... on playgrounds and family rooms ... we plants seeds of decency and goodness ... or we plants seeds of selfishness and greed. We may not see these seeds grow right away ... but the soil is there ----- and we are the ones doing the planting ... in the way we walk, and talk, and carry ourselves each day.

Yes, our world needs a prophet. Later today and tomorrow ... the prophet may be you.

Don Borling All Saints Lutheran Church 13350 LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL 60462

February 1, 2009

www.allsaintsjoy.com allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net 708-448-2939