

Sermon: January 29, 2012
"Demons ... the Ark ... and Bingo"

What are demons anyway????

Jesus is at the synagogue ... and a man is yelling at him ... proclaiming Jesus has come "to destroy his people."

The people blame his behavior on demon possession.

Isn't this convenient??? Wouldn't it be nice if ... whenever we say or do something wrong ... we could blame it on some kind of "demon" possessing us.

So, what does Jesus do? ----- he addresses this head-on ... and commands the demon "to come out."

I don't know much about demon possession ... I don't know much about anything, really.

But I do know ---- there are some "demons" out there.

When someone of one race hates someone of another race ... just because one is a different color ---- there must be a "demon" in there somewhere.

When a family member cheats another family member ... there must be a "demon" involved.

When I don't have the guts to be truthful to another person ... and go behind his/her back ... there's gotta be a "demon" in there somewhere.

When someone uses religion as an excuse to lash-out at another ... a "demon" is probably involved.

Like Jesus ----- we need to have the gentle courage to look our demons in the face ... and say ----

"Come out ... get out ... let's clean things up!!"

Life is about healing and goodness ... it's about coming together ... life is about families hanging together ...

it's about rejoicing in our differences and keeping the barriers down & the demons out!

So, if you are in a funk. If you feel like your "demons" are getting the best of you. If you need to be reminded about what's important and what's not ... well, you have some options.

You can find an expensive therapist.

You can make an appointment with the clergy-person of your choice.

Or ----- you can watch the movie "FORREST GUMP" again.

Jude and I celebrated our anniversary last night ... and, of course, we are party animals. Yes, we watched "Forrest Gump." There is one scene reminding me of what happened last week to the young African-American student ... who was beaten-up in a horrible hate-crime. Forrest is walking home from school.

He is wearing awkward, metal leg braces. Three kids on bicycles are after him. Forrest's girl-friend yells: "RUN, FORREST ... RUN!@!!"

He runs.

At first ... awkward and slow.

He limps and rattles and shakes ... he speeds up ... and, as he does ----- his braces come off.

Forrest is running away from prejudice and hatred ... he's running away from his self-doubts ---- thinking his disabilities make him less of a person than others.

Yes ---- he runs ... and his braces fly-off ... as his doubts and fears fly-off, too. The "demons" that have kept him down ... they no longer have any power. Run, Forrest ... run!! Run away from doubting yourself ... run away from thinking a disability can keep you down. Look your demons right in the face ... and tell them "to come out."

Jesus comes into our world and says ----- demons aren't the work of the devil. Most demons are of our own making. We let "stuff" control us that doesn't have to.

Sure ---- life can be unfair ... life often doesn't make sense ... and some of us have much more to deal with than we should have to. But this never has to come between us or define us.

Do you ever have a moment ... when you just stop ... and look at the world around you ... and MARVEL. Three of our kids live in 3 different parts of the city. It's like every neighborhood has a name ---- Roscoe Village, Humboldt Park, Bucktown, Pilsen, Lithuanian Village ... even some place "up north" where a few remaining Swedes live ...

I drove to North Milwaukee Avenue to pick up some furniture for our daughter Layla. The store is called "The Ark." Sounds biblical to me!@!! Well ---- it's a big ol' thrift store. I double park ... go inside ... and there is a wrinkly old lady behind a dusty counter ... with a dirty coffee pot behind her. I show her the ticket ---- "about time you got here ... this stuff is taking up a lot of space in our storage room." She summons two guys to help me load the furniture ... and they are an art-form all their own. Before even starting ... I give each of them a tip. Made their day!@!! ... and they hug me.

As I wait for them ... I look around ... and realize why this place is called "the Ark" two of every kind of person God ever invented has to be in this store!@!! After it's all loaded ... I pull over ... get out of my truck ... and just look around. I smile ... I grin ... I look up into the sky: WHAT AN AMAZING WORLD.

So many kinds of people ... our world is a casserole of humanity.

And I'm so doggoned absorbed in my own journey and life ... I don't take enough time to enjoy the incredible miracles and mosaics surrounding us ---- every day!!

I'm sure God cries a lot ... with some of the stuff we do ... the way we treat others. Whenever one of God's children suffers ... God suffers and cries, too. But I know God also grins ... he has to have a sense of humor about his creation. I so much believe God uses common-ordinary moments to help us discover the power of what is good and what is right.

Do you like bingo???? ... Lutheran bingo????

We had it here Friday night. Half the money we raise is designated for our vets at the Illinois Veterans' Home in Manteno. The other half for Paul and Judie Newman's grand-kids. Most of you know ---- their 42-year-old son died in a car accident just before Christmas. He leaves behind ---- his wife ... a new-born baby ... and 4 other kids. Anyway ---- the last game of the night is a cover-all. You have to cover the entire card ... the winner gets \$150 ----- this is a lot for us "Lutherans."

Well ---- Jude and I are playing our cards ... Jude needs only one more number. I look at her ---- "Jude, we can't win this game ... it would be awkward!@!!" The next number is called ... we hear the word "BINGO" in the distance. And who is the winner????? ----- PAUL NEWMAN ... grandpa!@!

Everyone just stood up and applauded.

Paul ... like the man he is ----- was about to hand over his prize money back to the men's club. We said ---- NO WAY!@!! ... grandpa wins ... give it to those grandkids!!

God had to be grinnin' ... and I'm thinking ... Lord ---- did you just have a little something to do with this????

There are some kids ----- facing the "demon" of losing their dad.

For a few moments on Friday night ----- those demons have no power.

And --- they have no power today either!@!!

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