

October 28, 2018

Demonology

*The Dark Side of Halloween*

Mark 1:21-27

**Opening words:** Today, I conclude my new two-part sermon series, *Demonology*. Before I begin, let me ask you two questions. This is the first question: What is demonology? Webster defines it as, the study of demons or of demonic beliefs. I really don't care if you believe in demons, or not. Jesus believed in demons, and that is good enough for me. This is the second question: What is a demon? They are agents of Satan himself. They are evil spirits, which can possess a person in this world or torment a person in hell for eternity. Did you know there are over twenty stories in the Bible where there is a demonic presence? I am not looking at each story. However, I am going to look at two. They both come from the Gospel of Mark. Both stories emphasize the authority Jesus had over demons. We have already looked at the first one, the story of Legion (Mark 5:1-20). Today, we are going to look at Jesus's exorcism of demons in Capernaum.

Our scripture reading for today is Mark 1:21-27. It is obviously early in Jesus's ministry. The Gospel begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and moves quickly to the baptism of Jesus, followed by Jesus's temptations. That takes us to our reading for today.

Jesus is in Capernaum. That community is never mentioned in the Old Testament, but it was a significant place during Jesus's ministry. It was both Peter's hometown and Jesus's base of operation while in Galilee. The text says it clearly. Jesus was in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath. Jesus took advantage of the custom of permitting visiting teachers to teach in the synagogue. As Jesus stood up to teach, the expectation of the crowd was probably low. After all, if you have heard one teacher, you've heard them all. However, the crowd was pleasantly surprised. Jesus wasn't just another teacher who had fallen in love with their own voice. Jesus was different, because, as the scripture says, he taught as one with authority. In other words, he spoke as one who came from God. Everyone was pleased, except one tormented man. There are several similarities to Legion's story. Just like in the story of Legion, the author identifies the man's problem. He is demon-possessed. Just like in the story of Legion, the demons speak through the man and question Jesus's intentions. Just like in the story of Legion, in the end, the demons are expelled. Just like in the story of Legion, Jesus's authority over the dark side is revealed. With this story as a backdrop, let me call this message, *The Dark Side of Halloween*.

**Mark 1:21-27** They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

<sup>23</sup> Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out,  
<sup>24</sup> "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

<sup>25</sup> "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

<sup>27</sup> The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

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When Jesus was leaving the disciples, he gave them these parting words, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" (Matthew 28:18) If you are thankful for Jesus's complete authority, say, "**Amen!**"

Halloween is this Wednesday, October 31. It has always been an awkward day in the life of the church. Straddling between winter and summer, plenty and want, life and death, Halloween is a time of celebration and superstition. They tell us it all began in the ancient Celtic world, where they believed the dead were permitted to return home one night a year, on October 31. No one welcomed those dead visitors, so bonfires were lit, pumpkins were carved, and costumes were worn to ward them off. At first the church tried to dismiss Halloween, but it wouldn't go away. With no other option, Pope Gregory III created a new holiday, the day after Halloween--November 1, All Saints Day, to remember the martyrs and those who had died within the church. He hoped it would balance Halloween out, but it didn't work.

In America, the month of October is dominated by Halloween. According to the National Retail Association, in 2016, more than 161 million Americans celebrated Halloween. This year, they are expecting the average American to spend \$82.93, which means as a country we will spend \$8.4 billion. That is a lot of candy, costumes, and decorations. You know the truth. There is an innocent side of Halloween that is fun. Everyone seems to have an eerie story that they need to tell. It has been said, everyone is entitled to a good scare. I have fond memories of trick-or-treating myself. I wore a sheet and said I was a ghost. I have fond memories of taking my children trick-or-treating. I wore a gorilla mask as I accompanied them. This year, Kathryn and I bought our granddaughter, Pippa's, Halloween costume. She is going to be a fairy. This year, I am going to pass out candy, and I am going to test a few pieces myself to make sure they are safe ☺. For years, I only saw the innocent side of Halloween. Several years ago, I was introduced to the truly dark side of Halloween. You know the story. I have told it to you in the past. And, I believe God wants me to share that story again. If you remember the story, then you will remember how it ends. Jesus prevails!

It all began with a simple phone call. I was living in the Cleveland area. The year must have been about 1990. It was just one of a million phone calls. When I first picked up the phone, there was dead silence. When I said, "Hello," for a second time, an

uncomfortable voice responded. It all began with the words, "I need your help." I answered, "How can I help you?" She said, "My story is complex". I explained to her that I was not a counselor. I am a minister with very little counseling training or skills. However, I said I would be glad to sit down with her as a friend. Her voice told me she was desperate, so she agreed. I asked her what her name was and she told me, "Pat." We agreed to meet at my church at a certain day and time. At the time, I thought nothing about it. It was just one of those random things that happens in the ministry. However, looking back, I must confess Pat changed my life, and my understanding of Halloween.

At that time, I lived next door to the church. When the day came for our appointment, I looked out the side door of the parsonage. I spotted an old beat-up light blue Pontiac LeMans sitting in the church parking lot. I didn't think much about it. I knew it couldn't be Pat, because she wasn't supposed to come for another hour. I was wrong. An hour later, I walked over to the church and Pat got out of the car. Everything about her said "victim". Her shoes were worn. Her jeans were old and rumpled. Her gray sweatshirt was shapeless, and her hair was uncombed. Her posture was defeated. When I saw her walking up the sidewalk in front of the church, I walked up to greet her. I said, "Hi! I am Russ Adams and I am the pastor of the Hathaway United Methodist Church! You are Pat?" She didn't say a word; she just nodded her head yes. Something told me, she wanted to run away. We entered the church and sat in a circle of chairs in the narthex. Unable to make eye contact with me, she stared at the dark sanctuary.

Our appointment began with me saying, "Tell me something about yourself." It was painful for her to speak, but in the next few minutes she told me her story. She was unmarried, worked in a nursing home and was estranged from her family. She was a cancer survivor who was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. I reminded her again, I wasn't a counselor, but she pushed on. About thirty minutes into our appointment, Pat jumped up and said, "I have to go!" She was gone in a flash. I was surprised when she called me a week later requesting to talk to me again.

When that appointment time came, it was the same story. Pat came early and sat in the church parking lot in the same old beat-up light blue Pontiac. She was wearing the same old clothes. We sat in the narthex and she stared into the dark sanctuary. This time, she began by apologizing about running out in our previous appointment. I said, "That was fine. People run away from me all the time." Then, she said, "I want to confess, I lied to you last time. I was checking you out and wanted to meet you before you heard my whole story." I said, "Pat, what is your whole story?" I have had nearly thirty years to think about her story and it still shocks me.

She came, to say the least, from a dysfunctional family. Both of her parents were severe alcoholics. Every summer the family vacationed in Canada. Her parents spent that time drinking. They entrusted Pat to her uncle. It was her uncle who victimized her at every level. He was a Satanist, who took her to worship. Either Pat's parents didn't

know, or they didn't care. Later, they said she made the whole thing up. Over a series of years on those family vacations, Pat endured the worst that one person can do to another. Like cracking a door open into a dark world I wanted to ignore, Pat told me about the dark side. She had been raped countless times. Drugged and photographed in pornography. She had been buried alive in a casket with only a small plastic tube to supply air. All of that happened for one reason, to please Satan. I wasn't wrong. She was a victim, and she was trying to put the pieces of her life back together again.

I felt completely unqualified to help her. So, I asked, "Pat, how can I help you?" She told me, she had been seeing a psychologist, who wanted her to find a minister. The psychologist hoped I could fix her broken theology. She ended by making two confessions. First, she confessed, she was cutter. She rolled up the sleeves of that shapeless gray sweatshirt and exposed her scars. Some were fresh. Pat pulled a knife out of her pocket to show me her weapon. Second, she confessed, she suffered from multiple personalities. I discovered later that Pat had seven different personalities living within her body. For the rest of my time in that church, I met with Pat. Do you know what I did? I went through the confirmation material with every personality, and I gave Communion to each personality once she (or he) had completed the course. I met with her psychologist regularly to keep him updated and to keep me going. As I wrote this message and thought back on my time with Pat, I discovered it was the most rewarding thing I have ever done in the ministry. It was one of the few times I got to help someone. Pat taught me so much. She taught me about the dark side of Halloween, the holiest day on the Satanic calendar. If you find Pat's story tragic, say, "**Amen!**" In order to help Pat, I researched the dark side.

Satanism has been part of our world for centuries. However, the source of modern-day Satanism can be traced back to one man, Anton LaVey (1930-1997). He authored several books to promote his dark world, *The Satanic Bible*, *The Satanic Rituals*, *The Satanic Witch*, *The Devil's Notebook* and *Satan Speaks!* Those books were vital in the creation of his new church, The Church of Satan.

The best way to explain The Church of Satan is that it runs contrary to the church of Jesus Christ. It is like a parallel universe where everything is opposite. Our congregations are called churches; their congregations are called covens. In churches, we strive to know and accept everyone. In covens, fellow members are unknown because their identity is hidden. In churches, we worship in public. In covens, they worship in private. Churches worship during the day. In covens, they worship in the middle of the night. In church, we talk about our eternal reward. In covens, they talk about temporary gain. In church, we sacrifice for strangers. In covens, they sacrifice and misuse strangers and those who are weaker. In church, we encourage and love. In covens, they intimidate and hate. In church, we worship Jesus. In covens, they worship Satan. Satanism is a sinister parallel universe. The hardest thing for me to accept during my time with Pat was that Satanism was real. If you get nothing else out of this message, then accept this fact. Satanism is real and countless people are regularly

being victimized. On Halloween, the holiest day on the Satanic calendar, Satan desires a human sacrifice. I believe, that is where some of those missing children have gone. If those two statements upset you, then say, **"Amen!"**

This morning, I am not going to ask you to ignore Halloween. Life is hard enough. We need to have a little fun. So, wear your favorite costume, eat your favorite candy, and attend a party. However, I want to challenge you to carve some time out of your busy Halloween calendar to pray for those who are lost in the dark side. Satanism is real, and many are being victimized. I challenge you to pray for those lost souls.

The last time I met with Pat, the routine was the same. She came early in her beat-up light blue Pontiac LeMans, wearing clothes that had seen better days. We sat in the narthex of my church and she stared into the dark sanctuary. It was during those last few minutes with Pat, she did something new. She looked at me and smiled. She said, "Russ, I want to thank you for taking so much time with me. I want to give you a farewell gift." I tried to refuse it, but she insisted. She said it was something she didn't need anymore. She reached into her pocket and gave me the knife she had used to cut herself. She pulled up the sleeves of her shapeless sweatshirt and showed me that her wounds were healing. Then she said, "Russ, can I ask you a question?" How do you get the light on the cross to shine like that?" I said, "Pat, there is no light on the cross. The sanctuary is dark." She said, "No, the light has been on the cross every time I came. It is on now. When I look at it, I feel safe." To my eyes, the cross was dark. To Pat's eyes, the cross was lit. I didn't disagree with her, because she saw something I didn't. I was just glad Pat saw the light. She had lived in the dark long enough.

Do you remember Jesus's parting words? The Master said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* (Matthew 28:18) And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**