

# Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

## COME TO DESTROY?

Mark 1:21-28

## Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

## Analysis by Eric W. Evers

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching-with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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## Diagnosis: Destroyed?

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Sin in the Synagogue*

This man with the unclean spirit is remarkable. Had he been so possessed for a long time, and "just then" entered the synagogue for a disruptive appearance? Had he been in the synagogue during

Jesus' teaching and was now reacting to it? Or does "just then" mean that the man had been present, but now suddenly an unclean spirit took hold of him? In any case, a disturbing scene unfolds. In a house of godly teaching, where God's ways are to be taught and preserved, evil is found. Demonic power has a grip, even when we would expect holiness.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Unclear Speaking***

But who is really speaking here? "A man with an unclean spirit" cries out. Is it the man who speaks? Is it the spirit? While the speaker seems to have "privileged" knowledge ("you are the Holy One of God"), the text is unclear. And such is the power of unclean spirits. They "wrap us up" in their own evil. Sin exercises power over us, yes, but also in and through us. We buy into and cooperate with the powers that oppress us. Are we not willing collaborators?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Have You Come to Destroy Us?***

And so the man with the unclean spirit speaks not only for himself. What does Jesus have to do with us, unholy as we are? Having joined in with the unclean powers around and within us, we have every reason to expect that Jesus has come to destroy us. It is a fearsome thing to face the Holy One of God.

**Prognosis: Delivered!**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Destroying Sin***

But the unclean spirit also spoke far better than he knew, or intended. Jesus has indeed come to destroy – but the object of that destruction is the demonic, sinful power that has us in bondage to sin and death. It may be difficult to tell who is speaking to Jesus, but it is very clear to whom Jesus speaks. He casts out the unclean spirit, freeing the man. Jesus comes to stamp out sin not by smacking his people into line with forceful teaching, but by bearing sin on the Cross. His mission to

“destroy” is really a mission of new creation. So, yes, the powers of sin are destroyed by Christ, on the Cross. Sinners, however, are not destroyed, but delivered.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : A New Teaching**

And so now there is a new teaching, with authority. But the authority of Jesus is that of gift and giver. He has the power to exercise authority by defeating sin and releasing us from bondage. It is the authority of mercy. And that power does claim us, and does change us. But it changes us not by our cooperation, but by Christ’s own liberating power. As we pass in ownership from sin to the Savior, the Holy Spirit of Christ works in us to conform us to Jesus’ image.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : A New Spirit – out of the House**

Jesus’ fame began to spread after this incident. Releasing someone from unclean spiritual oppression is like throwing a rock into water; the ripples spread out. Freed from sin’s power, we are now sent out to live that divine freedom in the world. We can see that the house of God will always be a gathering of sinners, but sinners who are delivered to go and bring the saving word of Jesus to others.