

July 5, 2009 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost *Somehow You Always Have Enough*  
Mark 6:1-13

Somehow you always have enough. That's the message we all have to hear from the Scripture today. Somehow you always have enough.

That's the issue when Jesus sends his disciples on their very first missionary journey, according to the Gospel of Mark. He sends them out and tells them "Don't take anything with you except a staff; no bread no bag, no money." How are they ever going to have enough to make it? How do we ever have enough to make it? He sends them out to continue the ministry he has already begun. People have been amazed by his authority over what they knew in their day as "evil spirits."

Sometimes folks read this passage from the Gospel of Mark and immediately get the sense that this has very little to do with us today. What is all this about "evil spirits?" That's certainly not a term we are very familiar with today. If I would ask you what comes to your mind when you hear the words "evil spirits" or "demons," what would you say? Old fairy tales? Paperbacks about dragons and knights? Harry Potter?

The *New Interpreters' Bible* dictionary definition says:

*...demons in the NT are seen as evil or unclean spiritual beings with the capacity to harm life or allure people to heresy or immorality.*

*(New Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible v2 p 91)*

Sound familiar? The Gospel of Mark uses two different Greek words to refer to "demons" or "evil spirits," one very familiar to the Jews in his audience and the other a word the Greeks would immediately recognize.

*... in these two terms he is able to communicate to both Jews and Greeks.*

*(in Mark demons) cause people to convulse and cry out (1:26) have preternatural strength, to injure themselves (5:3-5) they throw people down, cause foaming at the mouth, grinding of the teeth (9:18) and provoke people to destroy themselves (9:22) (Ibid., p. 96)*

It is clear that whatever you call this, it is something that is not of God.

I would suggest to you this morning that Jesus is speaking directly to our needs today as he takes on these "demons." I would further suggest to you this morning

that we really don't need a Greek vocabulary lesson to know exactly what Jesus is talking about. He is surely communicating very clearly with us, as the Gospel of Mark intends. We know all about things that are "not of God." As I experience persons caught up in the ravages of disease, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, these terms ("evil spirits," "demons") seem to describe pretty well what I observe. When I think of Gabe (4), Leya (1), Tori (b. May 15) and consider the world in which my three grandchildren have been born with the temptations, dangers, and pitfalls over which their parents and grandparents have absolutely no control, well, I think you know what I am talking about as well. You don't have to explain to me what demons and evil spirits are in our day while my son, their father, Chris, serves right now in the United States Army in Afghanistan. I simply don't know any other way to describe the causes of war, do you? No, we don't call them "demons" or "evil spirits" but we know them very well indeed.

The issue is, when we face disease, temptations of this culture, or the very real realities of violence and war, we just don't have enough to deal with all that. We don't. I don't.

But this is where you and I need to hear the good news this morning.

If you reread the first few chapters of the Gospel of Mark you will rediscover how central this issue of demons was for the folks whom Jesus served and how vital he considered his mission to be to silence them and drive them out. It is in the very first chapter they address him:

*"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."* (To which Jesus replied,)  
*"Be silent and come out of him."* 1:24

In the third chapter:

*Whenever evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.*  
 3:11

(Only Jesus could convert evil spirits into messengers of the Gospel, then tell them to be quiet about it because it was not yet time to fully reveal him!)

The Gospel of Mark makes it very clear: evil spirits and demons had a hold on people. They held the world captive and so clamped down on creation that God

sent the very Son of God to set us free. The demons knew him, feared him, and ultimately obey him.

And the people knew it. That's why they thronged to his side everywhere he went. That's why they believed in him, everybody except those from his home town who probably wondered how this local craftsman, this hometown carpenter, even dared to step outside his social standing and accepted role status in that small village and masquerade as an educated interpreter of the law, thus dishonoring his family. Though he was not honored in his hometown, everybody else, it seems, ran after him as if he had his finger right on the pulse of the issue of life itself and could even grant that life to those who would ask it of him.

And you know how those who were released from the power of evil spirits and demons came to be so. Jesus found one man in the synagogue at his very first Sabbath teaching. Another came up to him and said, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Another man had four friends who tore off the roof and lowered him down to Jesus because of the great crowd. A father came to him asking for help for his daughter, and one young woman just wanted to touch the hem of his garment. They were all set free. How did that come to be for them? They just found a way to speak to Jesus. They just got to him any way they could. That was it.

I don't know about you, but in my life there are big demons and smaller demons. And it seems to me that change always has a way of bringing out its own little demons. Recently they start to look like packing boxes and newsprint paper strewn around everywhere. They begin to feel like a combination of excitement and worry:

*It's great to be in a new place with wonderful people who have a clear sense of mission and commitment, but will I be up to the task? Will they like me? Will I have what it takes?*

Or, from the other perspective:

*What will our new preachers be like? Will they like me? Will he fulfill my expectations? Will she help us finally start that new worship service?*

Change always brings some anxiety, no matter how confident we seem to be in the sufficiency of God.

But I must say to you that as Jessie and I come to be your pastors we have already had the gracious experience of friends who, in essence, opened up the roof for us and brought us to the very presence of our Lord. On June 27 you held a Prayer Day. Cheryl, Jessie, and I were among those for whom you prayed. When we arrived there were waiting for us these personally written prayer cards with warm words of welcome, greeting, and promises of prayer for us. I cannot tell you what it means to us to know that on your Associate Pastor's moving day, this community of faith paused for a day of prayer for us.

It reminds me of a story that Bishop Kenneth Goodson told. Bishop Goodson ordained Cheryl and me together as Elders some 30 years ago. He shared the same anxiety coming to a new appointment as most of us itinerant ministers do during that change. At his very first appointment he found a note on his desk from one of his new parishioners. On it she wrote, I am praying for you. When he moved to his next appointment, soon upon arrival he received a letter from this same parishioner who wrote, "I am still praying for you." At each and every move she faithfully remembered him in prayer, even to the day he sat at the Bishop's desk in the Alabama-West Florida Conference where he found a note from her that read, "Still prayin."

I remember another move we made. When we had packed the last box and were preparing to leave our home in Virginia Beach for our first appointment on this District at Bethany Church in Hampton some 14 years ago, I remember it well. It was 10:00 at night and the truck was just pulling away with all our stuff. We had finally put the final pieces in the car and I was anxious to get the kids, then 11 and 7, to bed, when Mom said "we're going to pray before we leave." As we joined hands, then 7 year old Salina said,

*Dear God, be with the truck as they travel. Help them so they don't break anything, and keep us safe. Amen.*

On my last Sunday at South Roanoke Church prior to moving here, I received this note from one of my young friends there, 9 year old Sophia:

*Dear Pastor Bill:*

*I don't want you to leave the church. I'm going to miss you. I think it is too soon. I know everybody is going to miss you everytime. I'm going to pray*

*for you. I'm going to think of you every time. I'm going to miss you very much. I know you were here like for 9 years and that's not enough. (I was actually there for six years!) You are very special to me. You are my only pastor and I hope you will be but you're not. I hope you like it where you are moving. I'm sure you will.*

*Love, Sophia*

Do you hear the good news of the Gospel today? You see, Jesus gave authority over demons to his disciples. From the beginning of his Gospel when Mark first describes Jesus' intention to recruit disciples, the text says

*He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons.*  
(3:19)

You see, people of God have a way of casting out the smallest of demons no matter how old they are, no matter how inadequate we feel. That is their gift from God.

You see, when Jesus sends out his disciples on their very first missionary journey, what does he say to them? First of all, he sends them out two-by-two (which gives Jessie and me great comfort this morning, you understand!) Then the text says,

*...he gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts..* (6:7b-8a)

What in the world were they going to do? Where would they ever find the resources to make it from day to day let alone cast out demons, for goodness sake? Well, I want to tell you that on more than one occasion in my life I have known two little girls with that power who never even gave it a thought! You can receive today all the grace you need, every resource necessary, at our Lord's table today.

How do we defeat our demons in our day? We do exactly what they did back then—find any way you can to speak to Jesus, or get to him somehow, or have good friends who can get you to him to maybe just touch the fringe of his garment.

When Jesus sends you out with the power to expel the demons that seem to so poison the culture in which we live, somehow you always seem to have enough. When you depend on his grace, giving everything to him, you always seem to have enough.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, God's people said: Amen.

William G. Davidson