

5 Epiphany YB 2024

Mark 1:1-39

### **Boom, boom, BOOM!**

By the Rev. Salying Wong

Boom, boom, BOOM! Boom, boom, BOOM! The rhythm of the Gospel of Mark is staccato, a hip-hop dance of quantum leaps, jarring contra-movements build intensity and urgency: First, a baptism with water supervened by a BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT; a spirit that looks like a dove, but HUNTS LIKE AN EAGLE; then, two exorcisms—a PUBLIC DRAMA in a synagogue juxtaposed with a private healing in Simon’s home. All the while we are told, his proclamation is shrouded in a MESSIANIC SECRET!; shush demon, zip it! No lyrical ballet here; the Gospel of Mark has a beat, Boom, boom, BOOM! Boom, boom, BOOM!

At his baptism, just as Jesus is coming up out of the water, the heavens open and the Spirit first hovers like a dove; but then, it folds its wings, and in the full stoop of an eagle, the Spirit plunges *into* Jesus. Immediately, this possession by the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. This Spirit has him deflect the arrows Satan’s temptations like a kung-fu master, with servant angels handing him the gatorade at intervals. And if you’re hard to impress, don’t forget the wild beasts that prowl all around that wilderness—lions, tigers and bears! Oh my!

Jesus is inaugurating the end of evil! Possessed by the power of the Spirit, Jesus is here to dispossess the powers that hold the earth and its inhabitants in bondage to evil, from anything that separates people from the love of God. He decides to make a public statement. On the Sabbath, at the synagogue, in the midst of a discussion, a man possessed by a demon stands up and yells, “What have you got to do with us?” The demon speaks an ancient Greek idiom, “What’s yours, what’s mine, Jesus of Nazareth?” Is it a warning not to trespass on the demon’s territory? Was he saying, “We took possession of this earth fair and square. This belongs to us. Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are, the Holy One of God!” The answer is yes, demon, Jesus has come to destroy you, to

dispossess you, to destroy the delusion that God is far off, to possess everyone and everything in the grace of the Spirit. Jesus will even dispossess you of your lying words, so zip it, demon. Mute with frustration, the demon convulses the man like in the last throes of death, rushes out like a shadow and is dispossessed of any claim. And everyone present says, "Whoa!"

Public announcement made, Jesus rushes to the home of Simon's mother-in-law. She has a raging fever, 106.5 degrees fahrenheit. Fevers in ancient times were believed to be caused by demons. But away from the public eye, the demon has no public statement to make. It disappears as soon as Jesus places his hand on her hand. Immediately, she is of full strength. Jesus looks at her with kindness and lifts her up. She understands he has lifted her from the grave. Stand again. Rise. Risen. She becomes an angel in their midst, serving like the angels at the temptations, gatorade for all around.

Yup, she better make a lot more gatorade, cause the masses are coming. After the synagogue people said, "Whoa," news of Jesus' power spread like fire. But Jesus wakes up the next day, and while it is still dark, he goes to pray in a quiet place. Prayer is better than gatorade. Its main function isn't to replenish, but to align his will with his Father's will. The thing is, exorcism, even as it casts out evil—the power to do so, it has its own seduction. You must get quiet to remember who you are, who you belong to, who possesses you for real.

While Jesus is having a deep moment, the disciples are spinning around in anxiety, hunting for Jesus. When they find him, they are miffed. They exclaim, "Our house is overrun with the sick and the possessed! The line of them goes for miles. And you're here praying!"

It's as if he doesn't hear them; he's certainly not stirred by their anxiety, which poses as compassion for the sick. Instead he says, "I gotta go to the next hill and the next valley and proclaim the good news there." And with that he starts walking away. Simon and Andrew chase him, saying, "What, you're just going to leave?!" And Jesus tells them a parable, "With what can we compare the kingdom

of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

They give Jesus blank stares. Jesus shrugs and says, "I think your mother-in-law can handle it." So, Jesus leaves behind all his good publicity. Whenever power is exercised, there's a shadow power constructed by the world to bend God's power to its own purposes. No, he is leaving this; he is defeating evil on God's terms. The next hill, the next valley, and then Golgotha. The power of God is cruciform.

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