

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: When Anxiety Comes Knocking

Lesson: Mark 1:21-28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "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!"

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

²⁷ 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." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

(Slide 1) When you think about last week, were you mostly worrying and feeling anxious, or were you trying to find joy and stay positive even with worries?

For me, looking back at last week, I realized I was worried and anxious about things I couldn't fix in life.

We went to Southern California for our last vacation. My wife has relatives there - her aunt, two uncles, 6 cousins, and lots of nieces and nephews. We usually visit them once or twice a year. This time, everything went smoothly during our visit. It means we didn't miss our flight, and the weather was really nice. That's unusual because usually, when we go there, we face unexpected problems, especially in January and February when it's often cloudy and cold. But this time, there weren't many surprises. Well, if I had to mention unexpected thing happened, we once lost the stroller halfway through out trip, but luckily, we found it again. We spent some time at a coffee shop in Echo Park, L.A., and when we returned to our parked car, my wife was in the passenger seat, and I was putting our son, Evan, who was sleeping in the stroller, into his car seat. I was so focused on him and the passing cars that I forgot about the stroller on the sidewalk, closed the trunk,

and drove off to our dinner appointment. The next day, when we realized we'd lost his stroller, we went back, and thankfully, it was still there.

We had a fun vacation and we were back in Wisconsin. Because of the 2-hour time difference between California and here, Evan has been staying up late. To help him sleep earlier, I've been playing with him a lot this past week. One day, we played in the snow around the house. As he played happily with the snow, I watched him from a distance, observing his joy. But, I felt a slight unease in my heart. So, I carefully pondered why I was feeling that way. And, I realized I was worried about the future, even though it hasn't happened yet.

Friends, we all want to be strong, but sometimes we feel weak. We wish for our lives to be full of joy, but sometimes worries and anxieties take over.

When fear and worry overwhelm us, what should we do?

(Slide 2) In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' first ministry is when he teaches with authority in the synagogue of Capernaum. Each Gospel tells a bit of a different story. For instance, in Matthew, it's when Jesus proclaims the good news in a Galilean synagogue. In Luke, Jesus goes from Nazareth to Galilee, sharing the good news, but people reject it. And in John, Jesus' first ministry is turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana.

In Mark's Gospel, it tells us Jesus taught at a synagogue in Capernaum. We should pay attention to how Jesus' teaching was unlike the scribes and carried authority. The scribes were the educated leaders who taught in synagogues every Sabbath. But Mark's Gospel says, "The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not like the teachers of the law." (22)

The scribes knew a lot, but they didn't teach with love. Love wasn't a part of their lives, and they didn't care much for the weak, the poor, or those who were left out. But Jesus was different. People didn't expect much from him, especially when they heard he was from Nazareth, a place not well-regarded in society and where poor people lived. However, when Jesus started teaching in the synagogue, everyone was amazed. His words touched people's hearts. Jesus taught with love and authority. Everyone who heard him couldn't help but agree with him.

(Slide 3) However, there was an uninvited someone in that synagogue. There was a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue. The man was controlled by an unclean spirit. We don't know how he could enter the synagogue, but when Jesus taught with authority, he resisted the teaching and tried to disrupt Jesus' teaching.

I see this unclean spirit as something that keeps us from getting closer to God, always making us feel anxious, worried, and troubled. They stop us from praying, make us depend on things besides God, and keep us stuck in negative thoughts.

Unfortunately, many of us are quite weak and easily affected. That's why we often dwell on negative thoughts, remember the bad stuff more than the good, and let worry, anxiety, and concern overshadow our lives instead of joy and peace.

In our worship service, we have a time for "sharing the joys and concerns." It's a time for sharing both joys and concerns. However, during that time, concerns often outweigh joys by a significant margin. If you were to share 10 concerns, there might be times when only one joy is shared, or even none at all.

But life is varied, full of colors. It's not just about worries. I wonder if your worries are stopping you from finding life's joys.

It's common for us to feel scared, anxious, and worried because we are imperfect. These feelings stop us from seeing and hearing the happiness that God has already given us. They create distance between us and God, causing a divide. But, God doesn't want us to live in fear or be overwhelmed by anxiety and worry.

(Slide 4) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says: "16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God wants us to rejoice always. He wants us to pray continually, and He wants us to give thanks in all circumstances. This is what God desires for us.

Therefore, I encourage you to focus on finding joy in life and trust that God already gave you joys and happiness. Whenever you discover joys and things to be thankful for in life, write them down. They will help you discover joy in your life.

Going back to the Bible, when Jesus taught with authority, the man with an unclean spirit disrupted the synagogue. However, Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit with authority, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" Then, the unclean spirit convulsed the man, cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him.

Through this event, they saw Jesus Christ, who had authority in His words, in that synagogue.

Friends, when you feel down, stuck in anxiety, worry, and concern, when your life is filled with negativity and dissatisfaction, I hope you pray like this: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command the unclean spirits that trouble me to depart immediately from me." "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command the anxiety, worry, and concern that trouble me to depart immediately from me."

Jesus Christ came to earth. He understands all our pains, brokenness, shortcomings, and bitterness, and He heals them all. There is life in Jesus Christ and there is joy in Jesus Christ. I pray that we live diligently and faithfully this week, relying on Jesus Christ, His authority, and power. Amen.