

Children's Time:

To the Children: have you ever felt scared? Frustrated, worried or angry? How does it feel? What do you notice in your body?

We heard a story today about how Jesus came to the synagogue, a Jewish church, and taught the people from the Bible. The people were amazed by him. The way he told his story was powerful, exciting, different, but then a man who was unwell came in and he began shouting at Jesus. It seems that he was very angry and upset.

What do you think Jesus did?

He saw him, he listened and then he told the bad spirit that was inside of the man to come out—so he could calm down and feel better.

- How do you calm down when you are upset? Who helps you?

There is a way you can help yourself and it is simply to breathe. (Breathe in.....and Breathe out.)Now yes, we all breathe automatically all the time—in and out, in and out—but there is something amazing, even astounding that happens when we pay attention to our breathing. Not only does it help us to calm down, but with every slow breath we take in, we can breathe in God's goodness, and love, and peace. And with every breath we breathe out, we can give to God all those things that hurt us or make us frustrated, or afraid. Somehow, after a moment or two of slow breathing, we feel better.

- So what do you think, shall we give it a try?

(Inviting all to settle in, Laurel guides them through breathing exercise). Ahhh. So how do you feel. Remember that anytime that you are feeling upset or worried and even afraid, God is as close as your next breath. All you have to do is breathe God in. Amen.

Adult Sermon

What do you think it looks like to love selflessly? Not un-selfishly, but self-lessly?

Last Tuesday 27 folks from St. Dunstan's, with several from St. Mary's, the Bishop and her staff, gathered to watch the documentary film, **A Case for Love**. It was inspired by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's way of love and explores how each of us, confronted by evil and heartbreak, might choose to do one act of selfless love every day, so to transform our world and our lives.

While the documentary did not speak of exorcisms or how to cast out demons, it did address many of the modern-day evil spirits that plague us — like: *Homelessness, PTSD, sex trafficking, religious and political divisiveness, isolation and exclusion, to name just a few.*

As we bear witness to our world's brokenness, our fear and anxiety can fuel distrust and disallow us the ability to truly see and hear one another. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to love.

Today, we find Jesus in Capernaum, along the Sea of Galilee. He has been **baptized and anointed by the Spirit**; he has called **disciples**, and now **here, on the Sabbath and in the synagogue**, Jesus begins his public ministry.

It is typically the **scribes** who serve as the biblical scholar and theologians, who teach from Torah. But on this day, it is Jesus. Those present are **astounded**, because **there is something about Jesus**. Maybe the **words** he chooses, or his **tone of voice**, or his **manner of speaking**—“**as one with authority**”—whatever it is, Jesus has brought scripture to life in a way that leaves them awed, and wondering, and if they are honest, maybe a little intimidated. After all- just who is this guy from Nazareth. Is he a prophet? Can he be trusted?

In Deuteronomy, God's people are complaining. “If they hear God's voice again or see that burning bush, they will die! — And who will lead them when Moses dies?” God hears and agrees, and so declares thru his prophet Moses that **he will send another Prophet**, from amongst their own to lead them. **But how will they know if this prophet is legit? How can they trust that it is God's word being spoken?**

- Well, first— **God's prophets are chosen** by God and are called to speak **God's words** and commands to the people so that **God's plan for humanity- love, justice, and salvation will be fulfilled.**
- If the prophet is true, **their words will always point back directly to God** and will stand the test of time. As Presiding Bishop Curry notes: **If it's not about love, it's not about God!** This mantra is a pretty good barometer for assessing the intention and legitimacy of today's prophetic voices.
- Further, God holds the prophet to a **higher standard**. Those who proclaim God's word are expected not just to speak but also to demonstrate through their actions and example that they, too, follow God and God's call to love.

And so, Jesus Christ teaches with presence and authority and they are awed. And then, there is a disruption. A man possessed of evil spirits appears, and starts taunting Jesus - challenging him to something like turf war, even as he now names him, The Holy One of God. And in that moment, Jesus doesn't choose to battle, but simply, with Godly power and authority, rebukes the spirit, commands it to come out of the man, and miraculously-not without a cry and convulsions, it does.

Now, exorcisms and the casting out of demons are not something we experience. If someone was to enter this sanctuary as we gather for worship, and to begin to shout wildly, we would think them deranged or mentally ill, and in our fear or out of our self-protection, we would want them to leave.

But here is the thing: **Jesus doesn't choose to cast the possessed man out of the synagogue—instead, he chooses to cast out the evil spirit that has overtaken him, thus compassionately restoring the man to wholeness and to community.**

- In the literal sense, it may be difficult for us to believe in this miracle. But found within it is an important lesson from Jesus about how we are to tend and care for one another: Selflessly, and with love.

When we encounter others who have been abused, exiled, or overtaken by evil forces and circumstances, **our call is not to turn away in fear, nor to try to quickly remove the threat from our space. *Instead***, we are called by Jesus to meet others where they are and, as best as we can, to tend to them with selfless acts of love. This is how the afflicted become free. *This* is what it is to love like Jesus, and it demands that we shift from self-focused to selfless action.

The film, ***A Case for Love***, tells several stories of how choosing to give of ourselves selflessly can change the world. Its prophetic message is that when we choose to tend to the other selflessly, with compassion and love, it is not just they who are changed, but we whose hearts are transformed.

The filmmaker and our presiding bishop also invite all of us to practice doing one selfless act of love each day. And then to share with one another what we discover. Can we imagine the transformation we would witness?

Now, I do want to acknowledge that **the heaviness of the world can weigh upon us**. Divisiveness and aggression, war and violence, illness and suffering. We witness the plight of our neighbors who are unhoused, who struggle with addiction and depression, who call out to us- sometimes shouting like a demoniac from the street corners- wanting

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The selfless love of God
Mark 1:21-28

The Rev. Laurel Coote
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to be saved but short of hope. We too may be struggling to arise out of our own darkened, hoping just like them to be seen and restored.

Like we did with our breath exercise earlier, we may first want to look within to examine the evil that plagues our own lives: Maybe it is our resentment or frustration, our need to be right or to judge, our insecurity or anger, or fear. Whatever it is, we can pray to Jesus, asking him to cast it out of us, so that right here where we live and move and have our being, we can be freed to practice selfless love.

What does God require of us but to show up with love, to do what's right especially, when it is scary, and to draw our power and authority to proclaim and bear God's love selflessly? This is what it is to love selflessly. This is what it is to love like Jesus.