



*Sunday Worship  
January 31, 2021  
Draw near to God  
for God is waiting for you.*

*CALL TO WORSHIP*

*Come to worship this day. Bring with you all your joys and sorrows.*

**Jesus will offer hope.**

*Come to worship this day believing in the power of God through Jesus Christ.*

**Jesus will bring us healing.**

*Come to worship this day feeling the presence of God.*

**Jesus will teach us new ways to live.**

*OPENING PRAYER*

**Open our hearts and spirits this day to hear the great good news of your power and presence with all your people. Fill our hearts with rejoicing as the words are proclaimed. Enliven us and remind us that you are with us, through the magnificent words of the prophets, through the ministry and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*HYMN #610 O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

1. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!

2. Jesus the name that charms our fears, and bids our sorrows cease,  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace.

3. He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me.

4. Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ;  
Ye blind, behold, your Savior come; and leap, ye lame, for joy.

5. My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,  
to spread thro' all the earth abroad the honors of thy name.

*CALL TO CONFESSION*

*Though we think we know it all, our lives reflect how little we respect others, how often our words and actions damage those around us. Let us come to our God, with our prayers as well as our hearts, so we may be healed with forgiveness.*

*PRAYER OF BROKENNESS AND CONFESSION*

**God our Creator, we confess that we are broken, sinful creatures. You spoke to us through the prophets, yet we have not kept your commands. You give a new teaching through Jesus, yet we fail to obey your**

**living Word. Forgive us, God of grace. Set us free from the grip of sin, cast out all that is evil within us, and bring us ever closer to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*WORDS OF BLESSING AND ASSURANCE*

*Quiet your hearts, beloved of God, for God is speaking to you with love. Rest your spirits, struggling ones, for God will surround you with peace. Open your lives to God's power and presence and do not be afraid. Remember the good news that Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.*

*OLD TESTAMENT LESSON* Deuteronomy 18:15-20

<sup>15</sup>The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. <sup>16</sup>This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." <sup>17</sup>Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. <sup>20</sup>But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

*HYMN #662* Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

1. Christ, whose glory fills the skies; Christ, the true, the only light; Sun of Righteousness arise; triumph o'er the shades of night; Dayspring from on high, be near; Daystar, in my heart appear.

2. Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee; joyless is the day's return till thy mercy's beams I see; till they inward light impart, cheer my eyes and warm my heart.

3. Visit then this soul of mine; pierce the gloom of sin and grief; fill me, radiance divine; scatter all my unbelief; more and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

*NEW TESTAMENT LESSON* Mark 1:21-28

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

*SERMON* The Devil Made Me Do It

True stories: A pastor was performing a wedding ceremony. As the service progressed, a woman in overalls with a buzz haircut and with a smoker's deep throaty voice kept yelling out, "I object." The pastor, seeing the snicker on her face, ignored her outburst believing it to be a joke. Even as the pastor tried to dismiss the interruptions by raising his own voice to overcome the woman's, the groom finally turned around and yelled, "Shut up, Aunt Bertha!"

Another pastor shared that while he was preaching a five year old boy walked to the front of the church with a hymnal in his hand. Standing next to the pastor, he opened his "Bible" and started silently mimicking the preacher.

One more. A pastor had his phone sitting on the pulpit in order to keep time while he was preaching. He said the word “serious” to which Siri answered, “How may I help you?” Siri is a voice activated assistant for phones like “Alexa.”

Strange things happen in church. Not this church, of course, but certainly other churches. Strange things were happening that day at the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus spoke. This happens at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He had just been baptized, spent 40 days in the wilderness tempted by Satan, called Peter, James, John and Andrew as his disciples and now he went to church to begin his ministry.

It probably bears repeating that “first things” tend to set the tone for much of what is yet to come. Little wonder, then, that interpreters have noted how the first scenes of each of the Gospels offer a preview of the author’s insight into Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus climbs a mountain to teach and interpret the law, like Moses. In Luke, Jesus announces that the Lord has sent him to proclaim good news, release, and healing, a message that exemplifies his ministry even as it is met with rejection. And in John the first thing Jesus does is multiply the wine and blessing the wedding at Cana, living into the “grace upon grace” promised in the Prologue.

So what does this “first thing” tell us about Jesus according to Mark’s story? This strange interruption demonstrates that Jesus has come to oppose the forces of evil, defined not generically but rather as anything and everything that robs God’s children of life.

Let’s imagine the feeling in the temple when Jesus got up to preach that morning. We don’t know exactly what it is that Jesus chose to speak about. All we know is that the hearers were amazed by it- and they were talking amongst themselves (hopefully not during the sermon, but nonetheless) and they were saying, “Isn’t he fantastic! He brings the scriptures to life. He makes this real for us! He knows what he’s talking about- not like the scribes- but someone who really knows this stuff- with authority!” Jesus was the perfect guest preacher that every congregation wants to hear every Sunday.

And it goes on like that for who knows how long, until someone in the tenth row, behind the lady with the big hat, starts heckling! It was a man, the text says, with an unclean spirit. Now, I know that over the years, we have had a tendency to make this man, and this spirit, and in fact this whole story, look like a scene straight out of *The Exorcist*: The man’s head doing a 360 like Linda Blair with crossed eyes and spitting out gallons of pea soup... the lady in the hat starts screaming, hands flying in the air...

But that’s not what we see here. Instead we see just a man, in church, with an unclean spirit, a demon. The very nature of that spirit or demon, we don’t know but we know that it held a tight grip on this man. Maybe, it was like the demon that the great running back for the Miami Dolphins, Mercury Morris, felt was within him. Mercury was one of the first professional athletes to be caught using drugs. He was arrested, tried and sent to jail. Why should such a successful athlete do such a dumb thing? Why should he throw his life away? At his trial he said, “I wanted to get away from it, but the demons wouldn’t let me.”

There are others, intelligent people with comfortable lives, seeming to have all that they ever wanted in life. Yet they keep doing things that destroy everything that’s good about them. When asked why they persist in this destructive lifestyle the answer is often, “I don’t know. I’m not myself. Something gets a hold of me.”

In the opening scene of the Broadway musical *Wicked*, the good witch Glinda is asked a serious question by a resident of Oz: “Glinda, why does wickedness happen?” “That’s a good question,” Glinda the Good replies, “one that many people find confusing,” She then proposes two possibilities: “Are people born wicked? Or do they have wickedness thrust upon them?”

It’s doubtful that anyone is born wicked, though we may have genetic components that may contribute to our problems or it’s a chemical imbalance. Most of us would probably attribute it to misguided behavior to our environment.

Wickedness can be demons. We don't talk about demons today. Unclean spirits are not part of our conception of the world. Doctors do not treat our illnesses as if we have been possessed by demons. Our counselors look for others causes of behavior of which we want to rid ourselves.

What *was* the evil demon that held this man in the synagogue prisoner within his own body and somehow knew the adversarial power that Jesus held even before that power was fully demonstrated? Again, we don't know, but let's look at how Jesus handled this strange disruption. Jesus' first words to that unclean spirit were "Be Silent." Those two words put an end to its ability to tear down, to damage, to sap the life force of the one who had served as host for its parasitic power for likely far too long.

Be Silent. Stop. Stop Now. Jesus response to the demon is words. As Janet Hunt said in her blog, *Dancing with the Word*, "Words tear down or they build up. They wound or they heal. They cast clouds of despair or they are the very light of hope for those who need it most of all."

Jesus spoke, "Be Silent." Hunt imagines that Jesus said this not only to stop the unclean spirit's attack on that possessed man, but also to put an end to the ways its words were no doubt eating away at his very life.

This story *often* concludes that the man healed was suffering from mental illness. Maybe so, but that puts limits on the message. What if this man was suffering from something that most, if not all of us suffer at some point in our lives? What would put ourselves into the life experience of the one who was so in the grip of the power of that which possessed him? For who among us is not possessed by one 'unclean spirit' or another? Who among us does not have something which has shaped us or marked us or even crippled us which is contrary to what God intends for us? Aren't we all struggling with strangers within us of another kind? Don't we hear their voices invading our heads?

What are those voices, those unclean spirits? Is your unclean spirit one of fear? I know that mine is at times. Fear makes me say and think things that are uncharacteristic of me in better moments. Fear can result in the inability to think clearly and act decisively. Fear of all kinds can take control of our lives: fear of failure, fear of the unfamiliar, of change, of other people, especially those who are different from us. We fear growing old, illness, death, rejection, withdrawal of love, missing out, and even the closeness of others outside our COVID bubble.

When we are fearful there is a voice repeating, "Beware. Don't trust. Not safe. Stay away." The power of fear can make us isolate and confuse us. Sometimes it feels like there is nothing we can do to overpower the fear and it virtually takes control of our lives.

Maybe your unclean spirit or demon is despair? Who hasn't experienced our hope faltering in these last months — at least from time to time? I have heard more than one voice state, "I don't think we are going to make it through this." Maybe you have as well.

Or does your 'unclean spirit' look like this? Are you held captive by long ago experiences, lessons learned, perhaps long before you even knew you were learning them which are so much a part of how you are in the world that when something or someone, in this case, Jesus, pulls them out into the open, inviting you by his very presence into another way of being, you find everything within you resisting because you have known no other way?

Thomas Edison was once told that he was too stupid to learn anything. J.K. Rowling was told to get a job because writing children's books would never amount to anything. Dame Judi Dench was told she was too ugly to be an actor. The same was said to Meryl Streep. The notes from Fred Astaire's first screen test read: "Can't sing. Can't act. Is balding. Can dance a little." Oprah Winfrey was fired from her first anchor job saying she was unfit for TV news because she got too emotionally invested in her stories. One of John Lennon's school teachers wrote in his end of the year evaluation that he was "certainly on the road to failure."

Are there voices that swirl around in your mind, unclean spirits that would hold you back or ultimately bring you harm?

Jesus spoke with an authority unknown to the congregation of that synagogue in Capernaum. It was an authority they had never seen or heard. It was, of course, none other than the authority of God. That *divine authority alone* had the power to overcome the possession. Those commanding words Jesus spoke that day were the words of God: “Be silent and come out of him.”

Jesus is still speaking those words today. He is still rebuking the demons of our contemporary world, as he commanded a release of that one precious human life centuries ago in Capernaum. The rebuking, commanding words of God are still spoken today against all the forces that inhabit and destroy human lives. They are spoken to all those powers in each of us that keep us from being the children of our Creator. Listen to *those* words! They may sound faint and distant because they challenge the forces that have taken control of our lives. But those words are full of power. Jesus is speaking: “Be silent, you unclean spirit of depression! Be silent, you demon of hate! Be silent, you bringer of hopelessness and fear! Be silent, you devourer of peace and love! Be silent, you destroyer of community and fellowship! Come out of my beloved children. Come out and make room for my love and my reign in the lives of these afflicted people.”

Jesus first miracle is to silence the *false* narrative and bring the *truth* – that God is more powerful than any demon and that we, all of us, even the least of these, are the children of God!

#### *PRAYER*

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others.

We bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

#### *HYMN #775 I Want Jesus to Walk with Me*

1. I want Jesus to walk with me; I want Jesus to walk with me;  
all along my pilgrim journey, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

2. In my trials, Lord, walk with me; in my trials, Lord, walk with me;  
when my heart is almost breaking, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

3. When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me; when I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;  
when my head is bowed in sorrow, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

4. (repeat verse 1)

#### *BENEDICTION*

Jesus comes to us, offering healing and hope, speaking and acting with authority. Listen to him. Go into this world, confident in God's love and healing power. Go in peace and may God's love and peace always be with you. Amen.

**Sunday January 31, 2021 – ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION:** Today is our annual meeting of the congregation to receive the annual reports, vote on the Ruling Elders and Deacons placed into nomination and the Pastor's terms of call. All members of the congregation are urged to join the meeting on [Zoom](https://zoom.us/j/127591875) , <https://zoom.us/j/127591875> Meeting ID: 127 591 875 or by phone: 301-715-8592 or 253-215-8782, immediately after the worship service for this important meeting and to celebrate who we are together in God's service.

**SUNDAY SCHOOL TODAY** - Join us today for Sunday school class following the Annual Meeting for all ages at approximately 11:30am on Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/127591875>. For one half hour our children will be hearing stories, singing songs, engaging in activities and games about God and God's teachings.

**Join us in CELEBRATING Aleena Lang's successful Heart Transplant on January 26, 2021.** Continuing prayers for Aleena to bring strength and healing during this time. Cards can be sent to Aleena at:

Aleena Lang  
c/o Nichol and Michael Lang  
8788 Easton Road  
Ottsville, Pa 18942

**Study of Fellowship:** Join us this Thursday evening February 4, 2021 at 7pm on [Zoom](https://zoom.us/j/127591875) <https://zoom.us/j/127591875> Meeting ID: 127 591 875 or by phone: 301-715-8592 or 253-215-8782. The group is engaged in a study of the New Testament book Revelation. With so much happening in our world, there are those who believe the end is near and draw this conclusion from their understanding of this somewhat mysterious book. Together we explore the actual message of the book and what it means for us today. Pastor Su is leading the study.

**Confirmation Class:** Will be meeting Wednesday evening at 7pm on Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/127591875>

**In our thoughts and prayers:** The Conner/Lang Family, Diane Dauer, Jim and Judy Ferguson, Aleena Lang, Natalie Pizza, Bill Wark, Nancy Yerkes, Raymond Tinari