

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“PEOPLE WHO ARE DEEPLY TROUBLED”  
Mark 1:21-28  
February 1, 2009  
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

This is a hard reading and probably quite disturbing to some of us. It takes place in Capernaum. It was the Sabbath and Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. The people who heard him *“were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”* Suddenly, however, there was an unexpected disturbance. A man began to cry out, *“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!”* You can imagine how upset the other worshipers were by this man’s outburst.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and this man began crying out, *“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!”*

Mark tells us this man was possessed by an evil spirit. Evidently this was the case, for Jesus quite sternly said, *“Be quiet!”* Then Jesus commanded, *“Come out of him!”* And Mark tells us that *“the evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.”*

We don’t hear of many people being possessed by evil spirits any more, at least not here. Maybe it’s because we have terms from the field of psychology that we can use instead--terms like schizophrenic or bi-polar or paranoid. Whatever the cause, this man was deeply troubled.

Many people today are deeply troubled. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, in June 2004, reported that 26% of Americans show symptoms of emotional disorders. Surprise! Some of these deeply troubled people are in church. In fact, some deeply troubled people are attracted to

the church. This is the one place where they can act out their problems, as well as find help for their problems.

According to news reports, Los Angeles police said last week that Ervin Lupoe, who was awash in debt and at least one month behind on his mortgage, shot himself after killing his wife and their five children. He was 40-years-old, owed at least \$15,000 to the Internal Revenue Service and thousands more on a line of credit. Lupoe and his wife, Ana, recently were fired from their hospital jobs after being investigated for lying about their income to qualify for cheaper child care. A whole family was wiped out because a man was deeply disturbed.

There are many people in our society who are deeply troubled. Some of these people find their way to church. Some of these people are in our families. Some of these people are our co-workers. And they can cause us much heartache.

Some of those people are powerless to help themselves. We need to see this. Some people have problems that are so deep that they never will think themselves out of those problems or work themselves out or even believe themselves out. Evidently this man that made this disturbing noise in the synagogue where Jesus was teaching was one of these disturbed people who needs outside intervention. It took a command from the Master to set this man free from his demons. You and I don't have that kind of authority, that kind of power. But we can help people who are deeply troubled. Here is how:

First of all, we need to make sure we are not contributing to the problem. **Enablers.** It's a word that professionals began to use some years ago. An enabler is a person who, by their actions, makes it easier for someone with a serious emotional problem or dependency to continue their self-destructive behavior. Another familiar term is co-dependent. Whether the problem is alcohol, money, overworking, too many credit cards, addiction, unhealthy behaviors or drugs we cannot help by contributing to the problem.

Some of you know people with these problems. When I was with the Atlanta Police Department, there was a young officer who was one of the hardest workers you could find. He was kind, friendly and always neatly dressed. He had a drinking problem, but his supervisor never knew it. He never drank on the job. But one day he drove his patrol car into the air

conditioner unit of his apartment. When his Lieutenant arrived and demanded his service revolver, he refused to give it us. By the time I got there things had gotten rather tense. But eventually, we were able to bring him under control. This officer lived by himself. He usually only drank when he got home. And he drank alone. He had money in the bank that he did not know about. He had checks he had never cashed. He didn't bother anyone and no one bothered him. Things went wrong one day, and he could not handle the stress. He was deeply troubled.

Professionals tell us that any time you assist or allow another person to continue in their unproductive, unhealthy, addictive behavior, whether actively or passively, you are enabling. Even when you say nothing, you are enabling the behavior to continue. Sometimes you say nothing out of fear--fear of reprisal, fear of the other person hurting, hating, not liking you; or fear of butting in where you don't think you belong. Perhaps even fear of being hit or worse. Sometimes enabling takes the form of doing something for another that they should do for themselves. It also takes the form of making excuses for someone else's behavior.

An alcoholic cannot succeed as an alcoholic without help. An alcoholic needs an enabler. Someone to make excuses for him, to lie for him and to clean up behind him, to call the boss to say that he is "**sick,**" when he is really too hung over to make it to work. No one can be a successful alcoholic with some help. We can contribute to the problem, or we can contribute to the solution. Some people call it tough love.

Deeply troubled people need help. Sometimes that means the entire family. Sometimes it means just the husband and the wife. You must get help for the person you love without making excuses.

Sometimes we blame our problems on others. Some are told that their problems and pain are rooted in some childhood trauma. Some are convinced that they have problems as a result of the kind of environment in which they grew up. Maybe some of this is true. But regardless to the source of the hurt, let's get help for the hurting people in our lives.

There was a hilarious cartoon in a magazine years ago. It is a drawing of a boy in distress yelling to his dog: "**Lassie, get help!**"

In the next frame, Lassie is lying on a couch in a psychologist's office. Well, Lassie got help.

Not everyone needs a psychologist, but all of us need someone with whom we can share our problems. Someone who will listen and will not judge! Women seem to understand this intuitively. Men sometimes find it more difficult. Most men will avoid doctors, dentists, and counselors until their pain becomes unbearable.

There are some problems that we cannot handle alone. We may need the help of a doctor, a friend or a pastor. We may even need the help of God.

Jesus only needed to speak a word and the demons that were troubling this man came out. I wish I had that kind of authority. I encounter so many troubled people. I wish I could speak a word and set them free. I don't have that kind of power. But I know who does. Even when the doctors have done their very best and the problem still lingers, God can provide the kind of healing that can set you free.

If you have someone close to you who is troubled, make sure that you are not enabling them, causing them to escape from facing their problems. Help them find competent help for their problems. And bring them to church where we can point them to God.

God is a source of healing and understanding that goes far beyond human efforts. If you believe that Christ is still healing people today, come. I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.