

## The Reign of God versus the kingdom of Evil 4 Epiphany B

Evil! It sounds like an insect that effects cotton, “the boll weevil.” The English word “live” spelled backwards and the devil is he who once lived. Evil is a disease and it is a plaque on humanity. Evil strikes when least expected even while in worship. Imagine our worship beginning as did in the synagogue in Capernaum. The sermon is hitting home with you and suddenly an outburst that disrupts and frightens us to our bowels.

Jesus begins his ministry with an impressive demonstration of his wisdom and power over evil. He separates the men from the boys. The synagogue has not heard such powerful sermons. Jesus’ teaching is different. He has real authority. The latter word is very interesting when read from the Greek. “Exousia” literally means “out of one’s own being.” In other words Jesus is not our typical rabbi who uses classical methods of teaching. Jesus teaches from his own wisdom.

Rabbinical teaching had its own style using a commentary known as the Talmud. The Talmud is volumes of commentary on the Law of Moses and the Prophets compiling centuries of

wisdom and understanding. For every teacher there was a different opinion.

One teaching concerning the story of the fallen angels states that evil angels are nothing more “than an invention to express God’s wrath and carry out the decree to punish man for his wickedness.” In other varied opinions the word ‘Satan’ or Satan is the personification of wickedness. Specific names are given to evil spirits such as Samael, the “chief of all the Satans.”

Other Talmudic teaching includes that the prompting of evil is a force within an individual rather than an external influence. And that there are two impulses in everyone: the good impulse and the evil impulse. The character of a person is determined by which of these impulses is dominant.

Jesus dealt with the evil impulse in one man in the synagogue. Jesus deliverance of this man, like his teaching, did not come from the Talmud, or scholars, but from within himself. He had wisdom beyond his years as was told of him at age twelve in the Temple. He spoke the words of his Father as he heard them. Jesus authority was immediate, personal, based on an unclouded faith in God and conviction that the scripture was God’s truth.

Jesus spent the first day of his ministry in Capernaum. It was his home base. The day begins and ends with exorcisms. From the outset, Jesus declares that the reign of evil's terror is going to end. Jesus declares in this gospel of his that the Reign of God is at war with the kingdom of Evil. God speaks and the demons stop their blabbering. They identify him as the Holy One of God while he is under cover as Jesus of Nazareth and he says, "Shut up you foul mouthed children of Satan." He commands their silence.

Satan's minions know who he is. And they don't like it hearing that God's kingdom is near. Why do you suppose?

They yell at Jesus, saying, "What do you have to do with us," another way of saying, "Jesus, mind your own business. This one is ours. Go back home. You are on our turf. Go anywhere as long as you don't interfere with our profits." Well, did this really happen? What does the church teach?

Why is it we never hear sermons on the reality of Satan and his demons – should we reserve these stories for Halloween? Why is it that neither the historical documents of our Church nor the Catechism of the Prayer Book

mention the devil? Do we refuse to give the devil his due?

Yet in the service of Baptism, in the renunciations on page 302, the Prayer Book boldly asks us, “Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?”

Do we deny that the devil exists? It is easier to say evil spirits are only fantasies, red creatures with horns and go-tees! It is easier to believe that the only evil we need concern ourselves with is what is inside human flesh!

If we deny the supernatural, then it is plain to see that there is no person of evil. Today, most deny there are messengers of God called Angels, who fight against Satan through our prayers. With Christ’s first coming, he declares God’s kingdom, and the world is in full blown spiritual warfare. The forces of good are at war with the forces of darkness.

M. Scott Peck, author of the “Road Less Traveled” writes in his introduction to his second book, “People of the Lie,” THIS IS A DANGEROUS BOOK. People observed that his first book is a nice book. He writes, “This is not a nice book. It is about our dark side, and in large

part about the very darkest members of our human community-those I frankly judge to be evil.” Dr. Peck urges us to reserve judgment for the battle to heal human evil begins at home. He asks his readers to handle this book with care unless people use it to judge others.

Nevertheless, in his fifth chapter, Scott Peck admits that when he started writing “People of the Lie,” he did not believe in a literal devil nor that demon possession occurred. In his search for the truth he found what was once unbelievable. After being present at two successful exorcisms he unequivocally says, “I now know Satan is real. I have met it.” Peck does not go into detail on these exorcisms. His reasons are twofold: as far as we know possession is rare and complex and the other is simple: just as a conversion to belief in God requires a personal experience, so does conversion to a belief in Satan.

This book, the Bible is equally not a nice book. The Bible is a dangerous book. It is full of hate, human evil, war and destruction. However, without such a story there would be no story of redemption. If we do not take the words of Jesus at face value then the question of his identity as God’s one and only Son becomes open for debate. It takes a conversion to belief that these

are the words of men inspired by God and are made holy as God's truth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What can the Christian do when face to face with human evil? First confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Second, claim the authority that alone belongs to Jesus over evil. Thirdly, put on the whole armor of God as St. Paul instructs us in Ephesians 6. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness." Amen.