

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible at the center of your group. Place unlit vigil lights around it. Display headlines in the news.

**LEADER:** Holy God, transform us in the image of your Son.

**ALL:** Jesus calls us to love, forgive, and support one another.

**LEADER:** From violence and fear.

**ALL:** Free us.

**LEADER:** From anger and rage.

**ALL:** Free us.

**LEADER:** For our flourishing.

**ALL:** Free us. Amen.

An unholy spirit cries out in the synagogue where Jesus preaches in Sunday's gospel. In North Minneapolis people experience an unholy spirit of violence. Bonnie Steele is helping the community heal and find hope.

Bonnie finished writing a theology paper and stood looking out her front window, still thinking. Her daughters, Nikki and Ashley, interrupted as they headed out the door. "We'll be back soon. We're going to visit Grams."

As Bonnie waited for her paper to print, she heard the familiar whine of the overdrive of a police cruiser. A car came into view, the passenger window down; a man leaned

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

out with a rifle, shooting at a police cruiser in hot pursuit, all in the direction her daughters had gone.

Time slowed as the man fired, "Boom, boom, boom." Bonnie's ears rang with each blast. She was frozen to the floor unable to make a sound, knowing her daughters were in the line of fire.

The girls were safe, but like many in their neighborhood, Bonnie experienced sheer terror in that moment. Unable to ensure her children's safety, Bonnie and her husband made a heart-wrenching decision to move. "If they killed my children, what would I have? What would I have?" Bonnie says.

Then a police officer's shooting of a young African American man named Philando Castile engendered anger, frustration, and fear in the African American community in the Twin Cities.

Mr. Castile was dearly loved by his family, his fiancé, and her preschool-age daughter. He supervised the cafeteria at the J. J. Hill Montessori School in St. Paul, a public school. Students knew and liked him, and he knew and cared for them. Black Lives Matter and other groups began organizing protests.

Bonnie's pastor, Father Paul Jarvis, asked her what St. Bridget's could do in response to the killing of Mr. Castile. How could a faith community respond? How could we bring our faith to bear?

Participants talk in small groups at a Come Together at New Creation Church.



Carlos Gonzalez, Copyright 2016, Star Tribune

“Open up the church and invite the community to come in,” Bonnie said. “People need a place to bring their fear and trauma, their pain and anger. It’s not only the shooting but the day-to-day violence they are experiencing, children lying on the floor dodging bullets that come through their windows, children and adults afraid of random drive-by shootings. We can pray.”

With this Come Together was born, a gathering to bring neighbors together to pray, share faith, and share their stories of how violence is impacting them. Father Jarvis invited other local pastors. Three hundred people came to the first service.

“I knew how alone I felt,” says Bonnie. “Where do I bring my frustration, my fear for my children and myself, my sense of hopelessness and my sense of isolation? Come Together creates a sacred, safe space where neighbors can understand one another and appreciate our commonality as human beings that bear a divine image.”

Bonnie and Father Paul take part in a Come Together service once a month in various hosting churches. Each service ends with participants walking in the neighborhood to sing and reach out to people they see along the way. “Our presence says that we see them and they matter to us,” says Bonnie. “In every gathering people find hope.”

● **What unholy spirits do you hear threatening? How might your faith community respond?**

# GOSPEL

## The Holy One silences an unholy spirit.



**NARRATOR 1:** Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum. As soon as the Sabbath came, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach.

**NARRATOR 2:** People were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one having authority and not like the scribes.

**NARRATOR 1:** There was a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit. He cried out.

**MAN:** What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!

**NARRATOR 2:** Jesus rebuked him.

**JESUS:** Be silent. Go out of the man.

**NARRATOR 1:** At that the unclean spirit convulsed the man violently and with a loud cry came out of him.

**NARRATOR 2:** The people were so astounded they kept asking one another:

**PERSON 1:** What is this? A new teaching—with authority!

**PERSON 2:** He commands even unclean spirits and they obey him!

**NARRATOR 1:** Jesus’ reputation spread immediately throughout the surrounding region in Galilee.

Mark 1.21-28

## Who is this that speaks with authority?

Jesus’ dynamic stride into ministry continues in Sunday’s gospel. With the disciples he called in last Sunday’s gospel accompanying him, he goes to Capernaum and preaches in the synagogue. Archeologists have unearthed the foundations of this synagogue beneath the floor of a later second-century synagogue.

What amazes those who hear Jesus preach is the authority he claims. He does not cite the legal precedents of the oral and written law as was apparently the practice of

the scribes. Jesus’ teaching breaks legal boundaries. He challenges the law in a sense that amazes and attracts his hearers.

Then a man whom Mark characterizes as having “an unclean spirit” cries out in the synagogue. The word *unclean* has its origins in the temple.

The law keeps things with the potential to disrupt the holiness of the temple from coming in contact with the divine world the temple represents. The law calls such things unclean. They include certain animals, people when



they have come in contact with the dead, women when they are menstruating or after giving birth.

The word *unclean* also developed a moral sense, identifying vices that distance one from God. The adjective *unclean* characterizes the man in the synagogue as outside the boundaries of the holy. His spirit represents danger in the narrative.

● **Whose presence in your neighborhood scares you?**

● **Who gives you hope?**

**T**he first gospel writer, Mark, makes repeated claims about who Jesus is. The first verse proclaims Jesus is the messiah, the Son of God (1.1). At his baptism a voice from heaven identifies Jesus as God's beloved Son (1.11). In Sunday's gospel an unclean spirit acknowledges Jesus is the Holy One of God.

Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit, a word that means *to silence, muzzle, or tie shut*. The unclean spirit will not be Jesus' herald. Jesus also rebukes

**The dark, basalt rocks that formed the foundation of the synagogue in Jesus' time are visible below the lighter stone of the later synagogue.**

the storm that endangers his disciples (4.39). He silences and calms two different endangering spirits—the unholy in a man and a violent wind in nature.

Both rebukes generate the same response in the narrative: amazed questions. In Sunday's story the astonished people ask: "What is this new authoritative teaching? Who can command unclean spirits to obey?" In the storm, the disciples ask, "Who is this that the wind and sea obey him?" These rhetorical questions invite us readers to respond.

The disciples are the characters in the narrative that interest Mark. Only gradually do they appreciate who Jesus is. Their fear, failure, flight, and incomprehension make them ideal role models for readers who like them also fail and flee. Repeatedly the disciples ask and ponder the questions that every believer must answer for him- or

herself. Mark presents fear and amazement as thresholds where faith begins.

● **When has fear or amazement become a threshold of faith for you?**



● **What authority do you give Jesus' teaching in your daily life?**

**A**ll of us have the work of discerning the spirits that drive us. What possesses us?

Ambition may drive us, the desire to achieve an advanced degree or a high paying job. Desire for security can possess us, a willingness to do whatever a boss asks in order to pay the mortgage and provide health benefits for the family.

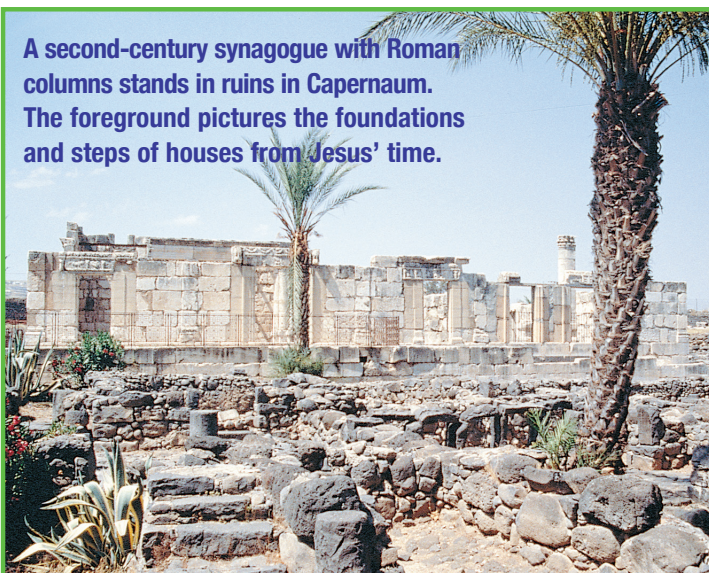
Alcohol or chocolate or drugs can possess us, becoming a comfort in our stress or pain, more perfect and pliant than any human friend. Fear can stifle our creative selves or choke our voices.

The unclean spirits are right to ask Jesus if he has come to destroy them. The answer is yes. Through healing and forgiveness Jesus claims us for wholeness.

● **Who clamors for attention in your community of faith? In your family? In your business? What possesses them?**

● **What clamors for attention in yourself? What erodes your wholeness or the wholeness you seek?**

**A second-century synagogue with Roman columns stands in ruins in Capernaum. The foreground pictures the foundations and steps of houses from Jesus' time.**



## Moses is Israel's founding prophet.

The book of Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses. Jews refer to these books as Torah; Christians call them the Pentateuch. The books contain many of Israel's oldest oral traditions.

Genesis has stories of creation and Israel's early ancestors. Exodus tells the story of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt and the covenant of the ten commandments. The book of Leviticus collects Israel's laws. Numbers contains genealogies, rules, incidents, and battles from Israel's time in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy is a retelling of Israel's history for the Israelites of the late 600s B.C. Its aim is reform, to rekindle faith in Israel's one God and to center worship in the temple in Jerusalem. It also links the books of Torah to the historical books that follow—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings.

In Sunday's reading Moses acknowledges the necessity of God raising up other prophets

to interpret God's word and call people into the ongoing future. People ask John the Baptist if he is such a prophet (John 1.21). Jesus' disciples report that many ask the same question about him (Mark 8.28).

### God promises another prophet.

**Moses spoke to the people, saying: The Holy One your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall listen to this prophet. This is what you requested of the Holy One, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "If I hear the voice of the Holy One my God anymore or ever again see this great fire, I will die."**

**The Holy One said to me, "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people.**

**I will put my words in the mouth of this prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Everyone who does not heed the word of the prophet who shall speak in my name, I will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."**

Deuteronomy 18.15-20

- Who continues the task of interpreting God's word in our time?
- What need is there for a mediator of God's word?
- At baptism the Christian is anointed, like Christ, as prophet, priest, and king. How do you live out this baptismal call to be prophetic?

## PRAY

Take two minutes of silence to breathe deeply in and out several times.

**LEADER:** Read several headlines you have brought.

Let us pray for the people in our world and in our lives.

*Each can make prayers of petition. All answer.*

**ALL:** Christ be with us.

**LEADER:** Let us pray the protective prayer from St. Patrick's breastplate.

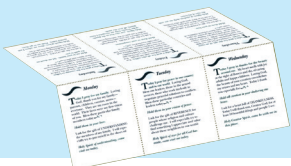
**ALL:** Christ be with me.  
Christ within me.  
Christ before me.  
Christ behind me.  
Christ beside me.  
Christ to win me.  
Christ in the mouth of friend and stranger.

Add your own statements, such as "Christ beside me on the freeway."



## Make Daily Prayer a Habit for Lent

Our pocket-size prayer journal has daily prayer at your fingertips. Go to [goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com) and click on the folding prayer illustration. Download the page, follow the folding directions, and begin to make daily prayer a habit.



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