

Sermon: *When Satan Goes to Church (Revised)*  
Text: *Mark 1:21-28*  
Date: *February 1, 2009*  
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

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Text: *Mark 1:21-28*  
Date: *January 29, 2006*  
Place: *Wrightsville First UMC*

One Sabbath morning, Jesus went to the synagogue at Capernaum and while He was preaching, a man stood up and disrupted the sermon. And he shouted at Jesus, "*Why are you bothering us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of Israel!*" Now, Mark says the man was possessed by a demon and Jesus commanded the demon to be quiet and to come out of the man. And everybody in the synagogue was amazed and Jesus' reputation began to spread throughout Galilee. And everyone was asking: "*Who is this that even the demons obey Him?*"

Now, this story is a little shocking. The idea that something like this could happen in church seems impossible. But the reality is: evil exists and there is a presence of evil in our world ... even in the church. In fact, Satan comes to church on a regular basis.

***YOU SEE, I BELIEVE HE COMES IN THE HEARTS OF NON-BELIEVERS.*** The church has always been a hospital for sinners and a hotel for saints. Christians and non-Christians have always co-existed in the church. Every now and then, I read an article about current trends in American society and it troubles me that 70% of Wayne County is not in church this morning. But you know what troubles me more than that? It's the huge number of church members who don't have a living, active and growing faith in Jesus Christ. Billy Graham used to say that 80 to 85% of all church members in America have never accepted

Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And yet, these are the people who sit on our pews, who serve on our committees and boards. Friends, there's something really wrong with that. Sometimes evil comes into the church in the hearts of unbelievers.

***AND SOMETIMES HE COMES ON THE BACKS OF BELIEVERS.*** In Ephesians 6, Paul describes a spiritual battle that is taking place all around us and here we are caught in the middle. Paul said: ***"For we are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies – the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness."*** And it's not only a cosmic war; it's a personal war. In another place, Paul described the battle that was being fought within him and is fought within each of us; he said: ***"Those things I want to do I can't do and the things I don't want to do are the things I find myself doing; O wretched man that I am, who will rescue me."*** So, evil not only exists out there somewhere, but evil exists within me and within you.

You see, Satan does come to church. He comes in the heart of non-believers and on the backs of believers. And now, the question is: Why? Why does Satan come to church? Well, I want to look at four reasons:

**FIRST, SATAN COMES TO DISTRACT THE CHURCH!** You see, the church was established with a mission. Our local church is to be a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus said: ***"Go into all the world and preach the Good News;"*** He said: ***"Go and make disciples;"*** He said: ***"You will be my witnesses."*** This is our purpose.

And if we can be distracted, if Satan can get us to take our minds off of what's really important and start concentrating on the color of the carpet or the order of worship or contemporary music, he has won.

And so it was for Jesus. You see, Jesus was sent with a purpose ... "to seek and to save those who were lost," but Satan came to distract Him. He took Jesus to the mountaintop and showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world and said: "If you'll just bow down and worship me, all this will be yours." And Jesus said: "Away with you Satan." On another occasion, the distraction came from one of His best friends. When Jesus started talking about His mission, about going to Jerusalem to die, Peter took Jesus aside and said: *"Oh no, Lord, this can't be. This can never happen to you."* And Jesus said: "Get behind me, Satan, for you are not thinking the thoughts of God but of man."

And still today, there are distractions. Satan comes to distract us from our purpose, our mission, our ministry.

**SECOND, SATAN COMES TO DISCOURAGE THE CHURCH!** My professor at Asbury, Dale Galloway, used to talk about discouragement a lot. He said when he was young in the ministry, he'd be so discouraged that he wanted to quit every Monday morning. And when he grew up and matured, he moved it up to Sunday afternoon.

You see, when the church gets distracted, when we take our eyes off of what is really important and why we're here, it's easy to get discouraged. This is something I fight continuously. But when I read the

Psalms, I often struck by the number of times, the Psalmist seems discouraged, even in utter despair, and I'm reminded that I'm not alone. And I've noticed something: the Psalmist may start out discouraged, but most of the time, after reflecting on the faithfulness of God, the Psalmist comes away encouraged.

And that's why I want to say to you this morning: Yes! Sometimes I'm discouraged, but God is faithful. Jesus said: "The thief comes to steal, to kill and to destroy, but I have come that you might have life and that you might live it to the fullest." I believe the greatest day in the history of Jesup First UMC is today and that tomorrow is going to be even better. And so, I won't be distracted and I won't stay discouraged, because God has a purpose for our lives. God says: "I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and to give you a future filled with hope."

And still today, Satan comes to discourage the church.

**THIRD, SATAN COMES TO DIVIDE THE CHURCH!** Since the very beginning, the church has battled conflict and division. Even before the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were already arguing among themselves about who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God. That's why Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples and the unity of the church.

And yet, in every church in the New Testament, there was conflict and division. In Galatians 5, Paul says conflict and division in the church is a result of evil, the works of the flesh. Conflict and division happens when the agenda of one or one group is

placed before what is best for whole church, for its future and its mission and ministry in the world. And nothing can bring a church down quicker than division. Jesus said: “*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*”

But still today, Satan comes to divide the church.

**FOURTH, SATAN COMES TO DESTROY THE CHURCH!**

Jesus said: “*The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy.*” You see, ultimately, Satan’s goal is to depose God so that he can rule, but Satan can’t touch God and that’s why the church is the battleground. Since he can’t touch God, he goes after God’s children, the church.

And if he can destroy the church, if he can ruin the church’s reputation in the community, if he can bring the pastor down and lead him or her astray, then the church takes a giant step back and the enemy wins.

So, Satan comes to destroy the church!

Now, you and I know evil exists. We know God is alive and well and working in our lives, but we also know that there is an enemy who roams “*to and fro seeking whom he may devour*” and Martin Luther said: “*His craft and power are great.*” And sometimes, because of his work among us, we are distracted; we are discouraged; and we are divided. But I believe Jesus’ words to Peter are true; He said: “*Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.*”

And so, Jesus looked evil in the face that morning and He said: “*Be quiet and come out.*” He is the guardian of the church, the One to whose authority every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth must bow and every tongue confess, “*Jesus is Lord to*

*the glory of God the Father.*” At His command, demons flee and evil is dispersed. And revival and renewal comes to the people of God. Mark tells us revival broke out in Galilee. Jesus became the most popular person around, because the people saw His power over evil.

And so it is today, Jesus speaks into our lives with the voice of authority as Lord of the church, calling us to Himself, calling us to repentance, to holiness of heart and life. Will you think about this as we prepare our hearts for receiving the Holy Sacrament?