

Seminary of the Southwest Conversation Covenant Biblical Reflections To Guide the Blandy Lecture and Symposium Conversations

Seminary of the Southwest Conversation Covenant

A seminary community is a school of inquiry and interpretation: inquiry into the mystery of God in Jesus Christ and interpretation, in both action and reflection, of God's creative and redemptive love. Frank, confident, and trustful conversation is an essential part of our common learning. Often, though, we are led into difficult, even disturbing, conversations as we bring the length and breadth of our assumptions, hopes, opinions, and certainties, into the formative power of Christian faith. Avoiding the issues around which passion and disagreement reside might well be an easier path, but commitment to remaining in conversation with one another despite our differences is part of our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We offer the following biblical reflections and questions to guide our preparation for the Blandy Lecture by The Very Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, Ph.D., Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary and the Bill and Judith Moyers Chair in Theology at Union. Following Dean Douglas' presentation, we will facilitate a Symposium conversation focused on the following Questions for Reflection.

Mark 1:21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. **22** His teaching shook them up and pushed them out of their comfort zone, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. **23** Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit **24** 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." **25** But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" **26** And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. **27** 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 heed his command."

Comments

In v. 22 we have translated the Greek verb *ἐκκληρόσσω* as "shook them up and pushed them out of their comfort zone" in place of the NRSV's less nuanced "astounded." Our translation employs one of the most common definitions of the verb as it was used in antiquity. In this passage *ἐκκληρόσσω* characterizes the impacts of the teaching of Jesus that pushed people out of their status quo and opened them to see things differently.

In v. 23, however, the phrase "just then" reflects an immediate, reactive, and oppositional response to this teaching of Jesus from an unclean spirit that possesses a

man in the assembly. The encounter's surprising result is that the teaching of Jesus then drives out this unclean spirit and brings healing and new life, not only to the afflicted man, but also to the other people in the synagogue who have been adversely affected by the power of the spirit's destructive voice. This conclusion is clearly confirmed in v. 27, when the people attribute the power of the exorcism of the unclean spirit to *the new teaching of Jesus*. The passage thus fuses teaching and healing; and healing occurs where no one expected it.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) As you listen to Dean Douglas' presentation, take note of anything she says that is truly new or surprising to you, whether you experience the newness as welcome or unsettling.
- 2) Where do you hear a possibility of healing in her words?
- 3) What part of Dean Douglas' teaching do you think would be most powerful for your congregation?
- 4) As you listen to Dean Douglas, try to imagine how members of your congregation might receive her words. How do you see your own role as a teacher and healer, in light of Dean Douglas' remarks?
- 5) Is there an unhealthy allegiance to some status quo in your congregation or, on the other hand, are there people who need to be encouraged to continue Jesus' bold teaching and healing, regardless of the response of others? Again, what is your role in such a situation?