**Gospel**: Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24and 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.” 25But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” 26And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27They 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 obey him.” 28At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

**Message**: Vital Space

A friend and former Nazareth colleague was describing the typical household chaos and corresponding décor while raising a family, particularly as the children go through the teen years trying to get them to clean up, put away and organize all their stuff from clothing to school items and sports necessities. She also include her husband’s collection of items amassed to support and enhance his interests and hobbies. She described one area of the house that was off limits to everyone except her. That area was what she called her “shrine”--sacred and vital space exclusively for her. It was the one area where she did not have to look at dirty socks, hockey sticks, soccer balls or fishing rods. It was a quiet, well-kept place for her to “be.”

God comes to us in our quiet space and sometimes in desolate spaces. Moses did not fill out an application for the job of “Prophet.” God came to him in the form of a burning bush while Moses was tending his father-in-law’s flocks beyond the wilderness near Horeb. Years later, Moses received the 10 Commandments atop Mt. Sinai (another name for Horeb), a rocky treeless panorama of one mountain after another (bulletin). In both situations, God came to **summon** Moses. We hear the word “repent” used in close connection with the summons, confess your sins, feel guilty about all the bad things you have done, let God make you better. That is part of it, but *summon* is a call to muster, a motivation to do something other than what you were doing or in addition to service for God. Moses was summoned, other prophets were summoned, we are summoned to turn 1800 to learn more **of** God and learn more **from** God, then to live more **in** God and spread the word more of God’s compassion, hope, and promise, and do more. Wilderness provided a vital space for Moses et al, where the human ability to sustain life was minimal opening us to total dependence on God. In our wilderness (whatever and wherever that may be), when we are weakest, God accommodates through God’s life-giving Word. In our wilderness, we create, or allow God to create, a vital space in our soul, a space where the essence of life can can be heard, where the word can grow and can mature. Wilderness opens a space for God.

Jesus entered the synagogue on Sabbath as was his custom, and he taught. He did not quote noted scholars whose words offered information and tradition. He spoke with the knowledge and wisdom of One who was in the beginning with God, and who was God. In attendance that Sabbath was an unnamed man who was sick, not with a physical contagion; more likely his was a mental, emotional or social oppression. Then Jesus’ spoke directly to this unnamed man; his healing **words** became **actions** leading to transformation. This exorcism was probably not the Hollywood version of spinning heads and splatterings of pea soup. Evil settles in and gets comfortable. Evil in so many forms is so present that society considers the situation normal. Jesus, however, disrupts the presence of Evil. Jesus, the personification, the incarnation of God’s love becomes a presence, no matter how tiny, in one’s life. Over time, vital space created through the power of God’s love heals, provides support, and offers hope and promise. Evil, exposed and made public cannot survive.

Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom. The authority of his words became action. You have come to worship this morning in person and through the internet. Did you come to hear words of a new take on a good story? To sing familiar hymns? To leave thinking I did my Christian thing for an hour? Or did you come expecting Jesus to make something happen? Jesus’ authority is his in willingness in everything to see God’s justice served. Jesus’ words, speaking directly to one who suffers, showing compassion, and becoming **personally** involved initiated healing. We don’t hear of Jesus returning and conducting a follow-up visits on his miracles. We do hear him tell would-be followers to stay among their people and tell what Jesus has done for them. In the telling, people are summoned/motivated to become doers.

Evil enslaves. Slavery/oppression still exists in many forms. A century ago babies born with Down’s Syndrome or other birth defects were often sent away and forgotten. Now there is inclusion in education, recreation, occupation. They become productive members of society. In other areas, people cannot rise above poverty for many reasons. Lack of opportunity, lack of ambition, lack of nurture, lack of education relegates people to survival mode. Where was/is the support to discover one’s strengths and help the individual develop skills around that. Not everyone needs Shakespeare or algebra, although one can have the opportunity to appreciate both. One may need to read and understand the math of the recipe in a cookbook, or how-to in the auto repair manual, basics of plumbing, carpentry, electricity or learn by doing under the auspices of a skilled mentor. Learn how to budget and pay bills. Stereotypes surrounding racial inequality, gender inequality, ethnic inequality, sexual orientation inequality continue to push people to the outer fringes of society. Voices rise to expose the injustice.

People struggle daily with mental health issues. Getting an appointment with a therapist or psychologist can take months when one is in crisis now. With the effort of many, drug **use** has moved from being a criminal offense to an illness to be treated rather than punished. It has taken decades to get appropriate treatment rather than incarceration for those struggling with drug and alcohol abuse and all the underlying factors. Now there are programs, treatments, and support groups. There are other addictions deemed repugnant even among psychologists that need to be brought to the public forum in order to provide treatment and support without having to become a criminal. Is it justice for one who is sentenced to 5 years while another receives 2 months for a far more heinous crime?

Families experience homelessness under various circumstances. The working poor cannot afford appropriate housing. Even the working not-so-poor find it difficult to find a house in their price range. Many are two paychecks away from homelessness. Some have no idea how to shop for nutritious food, how to budget what monies they have, how to maintain what little they have, how to nurture the children they have. Meanwhile Evil advertises the importance of spending small fortunes for a particular car, or certain fashions, get rid of wrinkles, sneakers endorsed by noted athletes, big screen televisions, electronic games that occupy and divert productive time. None of these fill that vital space.

For many who suffer, if Jesus were to physically walk into this church, any church, any outdoor venue, they would not only touch the fringe of his garment—that small bit of vital space, they would hang on with a fierce grip. Vital space, that tiny bit of one’s heart, that mustard seed of faith in one’s soul recognizes Jesus and makes room for Jesus. When Jesus enters that vital space he enlarges it to be filled not only with compassion, but with resolve in all of us to act—to allow Jesus to act through us. Jesus did not offer words only; Jesus backed up everything he said with actions. Jesus makes things happen. Why are we here this morning? Jesus, fill our vital space and make things happen. Just make it happen, Jesus!

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Prayer**: A prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola—*Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess, you have given me; I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more*. We continue to pray as Jesus teaches, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: Almighty and loving God, we are unworthy servants, yet we offer our humble thanks for all your goodness and kindness. We bless you for this life and especially for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ. Thank you for the means of grace and for the hope of glory. Let our hearts always be thankful and offer praise with our lips and with our lives. All honor and glory are yours, O God. Amen.

**Benediction**: Grant, O Lord, that what has been said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, go in grace to love and serve the Lord.

**Old Testament**: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. 16This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” 17Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. 18I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. 20But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

**New Testament**: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3but anyone who loves God is known by him.

4Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— 6yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

7It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8“Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.