

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, Year B  
January 28, 2018  
Mark 1:21-28

### Love Wins

*We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of God, full of grace and truth. Amen.*

Twenty years ago, an unknown, single mother in the U.K.

wrote a book and turned an entire generation or two into avid readers.

That was the beginning of the Harry Potter craze which continues today.

This past year, my daughter has jumped in head first.

We're halfway through Harry's journey through Hogwarts

and having read them the first time around myself,

I'm thoroughly enjoying experiencing them again

as Avery delights in one after another.

For the uninitiated among us, the Harry Potter series chronicles the story of Harry,

an orphaned boy wizard who learns to harness not only magic, but life itself.

In the first book, *Harry Potter and Sorcerer's Stone*,

Harry has arrived at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

and is hearing stories about the elusive sorcerer's stone.

This elixir of life is the key to eternity

and Harry must find it before the evil Lord Voldemort does.

The evil Lord Voldemort and Harry already have a history

as Voldemort is the one who murdered his parents

and left the telling scar across his forehead.

Harry searches for the stone, the key to eternity,

wanting to use it for good by keeping it out of the hands of evil.

After a number of adventures,

Harry emerges on the other side having found and destroyed the stone.

Along the way, he comes to realize Voldemort's evil powers cannot harm him.

As Professor Dumbledore explains to Harry,

"Your mother died to save you when Voldemort tried to kill you.

**If there is one thing evil cannot understand, it is love.**

Love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark.

To have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loves us is gone,

will give us some protection forever."

One reason Harry's story is so captivating

is because it draws upon the essential narratives of our lives;

the battle between good and evil.

Many a franchise and fable have been founded upon this basic tension.

It draws us in and speaks to us because it reflects our experience and our reality.

There is evil in our world. Sin is rampant.

And most of us, desperately seek and desire for goodness and truth to triumph.

Isn't that right?

When reading Harry Potter, we are suspicious of Snape,  
find ourselves muttering about He-who-shall-not-be-named,  
and cheering loudly for Harry, Hermione, and Ron  
the trio of do-gooders who represent righteousness and love.

Today's gospel, despite sounding strange to our twenty-first century ears,  
is this same dramatic tension, this same cosmic conflict being played out –  
here between Jesus and a demon.

This theme of the power of evil versus the power of God  
is something which we will see repeated over and again  
throughout the first half of Mark's gospel.

This story of Jesus casting out the demons, is actually a teaching story  
inside an exorcism in which the two are intertwined, each interpreting the other.

But first, it's fascinating to note several things about this story in Mark's gospel.

This story comes after Jesus' baptism, his forty days in the wilderness,  
and the calling of the disciples.

Casting out demons is Jesus' first public deed of power in this gospel,  
a situation in which Jesus makes the unclean, clean.

There are eighteen miracle stories in Mark and of those,  
thirteen have to do with healing.

Of the thirteen healing stories,  
four of those are casting out demons. That's a lot of demons.

This focus on the power of Jesus over the power of demons tells us several things.

First, at the time in which this text was written,  
religious life itself was under siege

with Jesus continually battling the scribes and Pharisees  
in order to transform those of faith

from a life of rigidity and fear to a place of transformation and love.

These stories indicate that the demonic hold on religious life was on its way out.

It is worth our looking in the mirror to see if this applies to us today.

Are there ways in which our church, our religion has lost sight of its purpose  
and if so what can we do about it?

Also, these stories of exorcism tell us that all things demonic are on the way out.

So, what exactly are "all things demonic" you're probably wondering?

Well, what are our demons?

They are the same now as they were then,

even if not understood in the same way in ancient times.

What are the things that take over and possess us,

drawing us away from God and away from relationship?

They are things like: depression, chronic illness, addiction, shame,

weariness, fear, anxiety, loneliness, hatred.

At some point or another, all of us are plagued by these demons.

These demons can feel as if they are taking over,

crowding our minds and pushing away the things which matter.

They keep us away from God. They keep us away from relationship.  
For more than twenty years, I've lived with chronic migraines.

There have been years in which the pain was unbearable and nearly constant  
and there are times, like now, when they are well managed.

But living with that kind of pain, for years, is a demon.

It is isolating and can make you feel as if you are crazy.

Others who live with depression or anxiety,  
you know what it's like when these demons take over.

You can begin to lose yourself.

But you know what? Those demons are liars.

They might tell us we are unworthy.

They get inside our heads and mess with us.

But they are wrong. They are false. Jesus casts out these demons.

God triumphs over these demons because they are wrong. Don't listen to them!

Each and every one of you is worthy. You are a beloved child of God.

God's love for you is stronger than anything the demons can throw your way.

But the most incredible part of this entire story is how Jesus conquers evil  
and **where** this cosmic conflict plays out.

It plays out inside ONE human body.

Each and every person, you, and you, and you are worthy of God's redemptive love.

Love conquers evil all the time and it happens inside one human heart,  
then another, then another.

Jesus goes to the mat for us, fighting for love to win over and over again  
on behalf of each and every person.

All people are worthy of love.

The site of this cosmic battle between good and evil, between God and sin,  
isn't on a battlefield, isn't in the streets,  
but rather inside each and every person.

When Jesus performs his first deed of power here in Galilee  
the message sent represents nothing less than God's attempt to enter into  
and reclaim our existence,  
bringing the Kingdom of God into places where other kingdoms claim to hold sway.

As Professor Dumbledore explains to Harry,  
"Your mother died to save you when Voldemort tried to kill you.

**If there is one thing evil cannot understand, it is love."**

Love as powerful as that leaves its own mark.

Christ's love for us is so powerful, it leaves a mark. It leaves a mark upon our souls  
and we carry that with us wherever we go.

It may not be the same as a lightning bolt scar across our foreheads like Harry,  
but it's there.

When the demons seem to rage, crowding out our thoughts,  
or we feel small and scared, remember LOVE WINS.

The cosmic conflict between good and evil, between love and loss,  
is continually being played out right here (in our hearts). And LOVE WINS.