

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH**  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5

*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,  
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

**March 7th, 2021**  
**3rd Sunday of Lent**

**...We Gather to Worship God...**

**Call to Worship:**

God calls us to worship during this season of Lent. We worship Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour and our brother, who loved his earthly family but created a heavenly family that we can be a part of. God accepts us too, as sisters and brothers of Christ. Let us praise God for His great gifts to us in Christ.

**Hymn:** Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone

**Prayer**

Loving Lord we come to you today to worship and adore you, to give you praise and thanks for your providence to us and your protection over us. We come today with many burdens and needs weighing us down.

Not all of our burdens are of our own making, some are the result of the oppression of evil powers and the fiery darts of our Enemy. Some of our burdens have been with us for a long time. We come to you today because you are the only One who may save us from our sins, and save us from the harassment of our Enemy.

Father hear our confession today: Lord, we confess the times we become so preoccupied with our goals, dreams and obligations that we lose sight of others.

Forgive us for putting ourselves above the needs of those we love. We are sorry for forgetting that we are part of your family. Forgive us for neglecting your family in our church and around the world. Help us to love and serve each other as sisters and brothers. May we work to build your kingdom here in our community and around the world. We pray in the strong name of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say, “Our Father who art in heaven. . . .Amen.

## ...We Listen to God's Word...

**New Testament: Mark 3:12-35**

**Hymn: 315 A mighty fortress is our God** <https://youtu.be/T0132OxXRdA>

**Message: Mark 3:13-35**

I confess to being torn about what to preach about this week from the text that our series Who is Jesus? Who is Christ has set before us today. The topic of family is clearly the one that the series designers wants me to focus on, and I do want to get to this. But in all honesty I can't get to the text without tripping over the big elephant in the room in the Gospel of Mark, of demons and demon possession, spiritual warfare. And I did ask the question several times this week -- Lord, is this me or is this You? Demon possession is not typically a Scripture focus during Lent...but what season of the Liturgical year does the subject come up? ...answer...it doesn't. So, I am going to talk about demons, people being affected by demons for a bit because they are in the Scripture (Mark is adamant that every one of his day knows that Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth and spiritual powers of his day) and they are in the news today. And just as in Jesus' day, so the same today, the modern world does not know what to do with them...how can they?..., most of the Western world, outside of Hollywood, don't believe they exist, including a large part of the Western Christian church. Many Christians today, including in our denomination don't even believe in a personified Devil with powers in this world, let alone demons that can exist within a person's being. Instead they'll talk about evil in a kind of socio-economic forms and in cultural biases which is true, but is not evil in its entirety. And even some Christians who do believe in demons don't believe that a real Christian can be demonized...that someone who confesses Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour can be affected by a demonic spirit but that is not my belief because that is not my experience.

There was a time in my past when I believed that but that isn't the case today. I have seen a demon come out of a person because I was there, I was part of the group praying for a troubled Christian man and I know what happened, I know what this man himself said happened. I know how surprised we all were in the group, but I know what we all experienced...a demon came out of a man for whom we were praying. Now is this the norm? No...but I hope you can understand why I cannot deny that it exists. (Poltergeist spirit in the

Soo...would I come and do a house exorcism?) Demon possession was in the news this week in the Lionel Desmond inquiry in Nova Scotia over a PTSD ex-soldier who killed himself, his wife, daughter and mother. It was revealed that Desmond told his psychiatrist...: "You're not going to take the demon out of me." The psychiatrist had no response to this. You have to look very hard to find someone from the psychiatric community with a Biblical perspective on demon possession. One I know of is Scott Peck, who wrote the Road less travelled, People of the lie, and then finally at the very end of his career and shortly before he died wrote Glimpses of the Devil in 2005 wherein he finally basically comes clean about two instances of demon possession and exorcism that he oversaw in his practice and the demonstrable proof he had come to believe in that demons exist and they can cause malignant destruction in people's lives. More recently Richard Gallagher a board-certified psychiatrist and a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College and Columbia University is another one who works with the Roman Catholic Church.

There are others but they are afraid of the majority of their peers if they come forward with their examples.

Now people, you know I talk about the reality of mental illness, that the church actually is well placed to help people with mental illness in their healing journeys and that the medical community has some very helpful resources for those dealing with mental health issues. But this is something different. Jesus isn't dealing with people with malignant personality disorders...Jesus was casting out demons, and he was getting in trouble with the religious leaders of his time for it...and this is serious...the big Brass from Jerusalem had come down to declare him "possessed" himself by Beelzebub (Lord of the Flies, Lord of the Dung) himself...meaning Satan ...he was even being looked at weirdly within his own family...they thought he was "out of his mind" and they came to where he was to "take charge of him"...because they were embarrassed by their son and likely in fear of losing their own social position in the eyes of their own community.

Then as now a couple of things are still in play.

One. That exorcisms are a part of the church from the beginning. In our text today Jesus calls the 12 disciples together to send them out to preach "and to have authority to drive out demons". Mark is very clear that from the

beginning of the establishment of the early church they were to carry on the preaching of the good news of God's Kingdom and to provide healing for all the people including the removal of persecution from demons.

Two. That the call of Christ and to his church is over even the call of family. This is a hard text. It's hard to think of this from Jesus' point of view, to know that this had to hurt...that your family consider you an embarrassment. The family arrives in a very publicised intervention hoping to whisk Jesus away for a while, keep him quiet for a while, and then see if all this talk about casting out demons and the Kingdom of his Father calms down. When Isaiah 53 says "he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"... did you imagine that includes ostracism from his own family? The true humanity of Jesus is on full display in this passage. How human is Jesus? He is so human that those closest to him could not believe he was also the eternal Son of God. And we have to know that his feelings were hurt, that he was vulnerable here but let us also know that when it happens to us....we know that Jesus can relate. When we hear the voice of Jesus in our heart say "I know how you feel right now"...he really does.

Hear also the message of what the church is to be to all of us and especially to some of us. The church is a new home, a home made up of brothers and sisters who love us and support us and appreciate us. When Jesus refuses to be taken away by his family he points to his followers and declares them his family..."Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Story of Marty Verk....19 year old Jew in Southern Ontario came to faith in Jesus and had to leave his apartment, his sports car, job, family because of it....showed up at the Lutheran church youth group, where he had come to faith in Jesus Christ, with a suitcase in his hand and nowhere to sleep... spent the first weekend in the church basement.

Friends, Lent is the season of the Church year that we tend to ask ourselves tough questions. So here goes. Are you embarrassed by Jesus? Because his religious peers were, his family was...when Jesus talks of the church being responsible to cast out demons...are you embarrassed by Jesus? Uncertain, not competent, worried you'll mess up...all ok feelings...Embarrassed is not.

Are you prepared to stand alone for Christ and be ridiculed by the general

population? When criticism comes will you fade into the background?

Few of us like to think about what we would do if we had to choose between faith and family, between ministry in God's name and maintaining happy relations with our loved ones. Yet, as I said, Lent is a time for tough questions. We know how Jesus answered. What is your answer?

**...We Respond in Service...  
Collection & Dedication**

**Let us present to God our tithes and offerings. (At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to [office@westminsterchurch.ca](mailto:office@westminsterchurch.ca). You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)**

**Prayers of the People:**

Lord Jesus, evil is such a harsh word, and yet Your Word uses it frequently to describe the opposite of good. While we are all capable of sin, we ask Your protection against those who call good evil and evil good. Guard us against those who scheme against righteousness and from those who twist the truth into lies to accomplish their evil intents. May Your angels hover ever near to eradicate fear and fight against the dark, spiritual forces we cannot see. Help us cast down every imagination and thought that our enemy tries to use to exalt himself against You. Especially give us wisdom to cast down the self defeating and accusatory thoughts that invade our minds in the night and keep us from resting in your freedom from condemnation.

Lord, what the enemy means for evil against our church body, we believe You can use for good. Remind our hearts of this. When we are being attacked and crushed from all sides, remind us of Your faithfulness to use everything for Your good and Your glory. May we not fear but trust in Your provision for our church family. May we not only be readers of Your Word but believers and doers. Increase our faith, Lord.

Lord Jesus, You dealt our spiritual enemy a fateful blow on Calvary when You

died on the cross for us and were resurrected on the third day. While evil still roams, the power of Your name and Your blood rises up to defeat and bring us victory against every evil planned against us. While malicious actions may disturb us, we have the full armour of your Father that You have given us to enable us to stand firm. You will bring justice in due time for all the harm and needless violence aimed at Your children. Until then, we remain in Your presence, aligned with Your purposes, and we look to You as our Supreme Commander and Protector. Help us to avoid temptation, and deliver us from evil, Lord. You are the Mighty One, the One Who will ultimately bring all evil to light. With You, Jesus, we are safe. Amen.

**Hymn: 490 God of grace and God of glory**

**Benediction**

**Now as you go from here, may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.**