

Sunday, February 8, 2015: Mark 1:29-39

If you're Jesus, demons will interrupt your mission of proclaiming the message of transformation and hope—even if they have to tell the truth to do it.

by [Nanette Sawyer](#) in the [February 4, 2015](#) issue

Once there was a woman who suffered the loss of her son. Her sorrow was so great that she finally went to a wise teacher to ask for guidance in her healing. The teacher told her to go from house to house until she found a family that had never experienced grief. She did this, and as we might guess, she never did find such a family. This did not take away her grief, but it relieved her sense of being alone in her suffering—and it caused a great compassion to rise up in her spirit. Her love for others softened her grief.

In this week's Gospel lesson, the townspeople bring to Jesus all the people who are sick or demon possessed—and according to Mark, "the whole city" gathers near the door where Jesus is staying. Are they gathered to watch the healings and exorcisms? Or has every single one of them suffered from sickness or demon possession?

The people come to the door after Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law by taking her hand and raising her up. I love this image of Jesus taking her hand in order to heal her. It symbolizes for me the perpetual presence of God through Christ in our lives. When I think of healing, I think of healing from all kinds of brokenness, including grief-stricken and broken hearts.

I remember once walking with a friend on a path around a lake, having one of those difficult talks. My heart was breaking. But suddenly I felt another presence walking with me on the side opposite my friend. It felt like a tower of warmth rising up beside me, a comforting presence that shifted my perspective. I thought of Jesus, of the way he comforted children and even the disciples at times. Was he with me there in my moment of sorrow?

I imagined myself responding by taking his hand—I literally squeezed my own hand into a fist as though grasping another's hand. It felt like a victory to perceive this company, this companion—to remember that I was not as alone as I had felt in that moment. Metaphorically, Jesus took my hand and raised me up. He raised up my spirits and gave me a glimpse of a future filled with hope. Sometimes what keeps us going, what begins the healing of our broken hearts, is not feeling alone.

What I felt was a spiritual companioning. In my spiritual practice at the time I had been contemplating the nature of God's presence. I had been practicing contemplative prayer and holding a posture of openness, waiting to see how God might show up. Most of all, I had been reading the stories of Jesus and wondering about the incarnation of Christ. There was something about the experience that was so physical, Jesus walking with me and holding my hand. How do we experience the bodily incarnation of God now that Jesus is resurrected? How do we know when Jesus takes our hand?

In this week's Gospel story, along with healing Jesus throws out a lot of demons. Do demons still possess us? The old cartoon of the devil perched on a person's shoulder isn't exactly an image of demon possession. But maybe the compulsion to listen to temptation is the possession itself. There is a force that does not let go easily.

I'm not one to think of demons as personified beings, but I do believe there are forces that work against the good, and such demons can take many forms. For instance, there are the personal demons that sow doubt and certainty, shame and arrogance, fear and denial. These demons make us sick, afraid, unable or unwilling to serve with all our gifts—unwilling to take the risks necessary to bring out our true selves. They interrupt our work. They shout; they distract; they obfuscate; they injure. Demons will throw you under a bus if they can; if they can't, they'll make you want to throw yourself under.

And if you're Jesus, they'll interrupt your mission of proclaiming the message of transformation and hope—even if they have to tell the truth to do it. Jesus doesn't want the demons to shout about his identity, perhaps because doing so might limit his ability to travel openly and to preach (see also Mark 1:45). Sometimes even the truth can be used to cause damage. The demons who shout out Jesus' identity are like Peeves, the trickster poltergeist in the Harry Potter books. Peeves makes noise when people want him to be quiet. He exposes secrets and throws things around just to make trouble, and he seems to take great pleasure in doing so. I imagine the

demons in Mark taunting Jesus by yelling “Na-na-na-na-na-na! We know who you really are!” They seek to undermine Jesus by telling the truth about his identity.

They also seek to undermine us by telling us lies about our identity.

It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t allow the demons to speak. It can be hard to tell the difference between an angel whispering the truth to us and a demon twisting the truth to confuse and limit us. Sometimes it’s best not to listen to them. But it is always helpful to look into the shadows of our souls and try to identify them accurately.