

# **“What Have You to Do with Us, Jesus of Nazareth?” by Anna Gilcher**

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A Sermon for Seekers Church

Epiphany 4B

*(Deut 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28)*

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## **What Have You to Do with Us, Jesus of Nazareth?**

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? That's the question the unclean spirits ask of Jesus in today's gospel, right before he drives them out of the man they've been possessing. What have you to do with us? The implied answer is "nothing." You have nothing to do with us. But when Jesus calls them out of the man, out they come.

Jesus, we are told, taught in the synagogue "as one having authority, and not as the scribes," or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*, his teaching was "so forthright, so confident-not quibbling and quoting like the religion scholars."

This forthrightness is what I would call "inner authority," and it is clear from all the gospels that Jesus had it in great measure. There was a way in which he clearly *knew* what he was teaching, with an embodied knowledge that is completely apart from the knowledge of the head. In Paul's words, it seems clear that Jesus' authority doesn't come from knowledge that puffs up but rather from love that builds up-in which, Paul writes, God knows *us*.

What rich imagery. Love is grounded, it *builds* up, fortifies the soul's space, and gives it the room it needs to move around freely and to be known by God; whereas this so-called "knowledge" puffs up, takes up space that does not really belong to it-I get the image of a balloon inflating inside of us, squeezing out the soul space within us until our soul hardly has room to breathe, blocking us from God (or at least from our *experiencing or welcoming* God's knowledge of us). It's a knowledge that has no embodied reality. It's only full of hot air, and if you've ever blown up a balloon too much you know what will happen to it eventually. Pop! and for all its impressive size just a moment before it turns out you've built nothing at all.

This does not mean that we should become anti-intellectual and overly simplistic-not that I think there's a great risk of that in this church! As we all know, there can be a puffed-up kind of knowledge in anti-intellectualism as well as in over-intellectualism. What it does point to is, I think, the difference between the words of experience-words coming from a lived reality-and words that are merely learned, parroted, repeated.

Celebration Circle has called us to meditate on patience and practice during this season of Epiphany, and I sense, this morning, that we are being called to dip into the well of our inner authority, to open ourselves to the love that builds up our soul space.

The unnamed man in the gospel has been possessed by unclean spirits. We, too, are possessed in various degrees by unclean spirits, aren't we? -by addictions, by *impatience*, by selfishness, by pride... by words that aren't quite true... These spirits are stunting our healing, blocking our love, puffing us up and squeezing out our soul space.

I invite you to touch that space inside you right here and now, to dip into that deep well of love and wisdom which gives space to our soul and drives out the demons that try to suffocate it.

Find a position that's at once relaxed and alert, with both feet flat on the floor, connected and grounded to the earth. Disencumber yourself of any papers or books you might be holding. Put your hands in a comfortable, relaxed position, maybe palms up... maybe one up and one down, bringing in the energy from the heavens and from the earth, allowing it to circle through your body. And, slowly, breathe in the presence of God. Hold the presence of God. And breathe out anything that separates you from God. Breathe in the presence of God. Hold the presence of God inside you. And breathe out the presence of God to the world.

*[long silence-a couple minutes]*

Can you let the air out of the so-called knowledge that's

puffing you up, today? What dark places are there inside you?  
What broken places are in need of healing?

*[silence-a minute or so]*

Can you allow Jesus to possess you?

*[long silence-two+ minutes]*

Where are the dark places, the puffed-up-knowledge places in  
our communal body?

*[silence-a minute or two]*

What would it be like if we allowed Jesus to truly possess us  
as a community, today-tomorrow-next week?

Let's sit together for several minutes of silence as we invite  
Jesus to possess us-to fill us with Love and to free us from  
unclean spirits-both as individuals and as a community. I'll  
bring us out of the silence by ringing a bell.

*[silence for about four minutes]*

Listen with me to this poem by Rumi.

*Those who don't feel this Love  
pulling them like a river,  
those who don't drink dawn  
like a cup of springwater  
or take in sunset like supper,  
those who don't want to change,*

*let them sleep*

*This Love is beyond the study of theology,  
that old trickery and hypocrisy.*

*If you want to improve your mind that way,*

*sleep on*

*I've given up on my brain.*

*I've torn the cloth to shreds  
and thrown it away.*

*If you're not completely naked,  
wrap your beautiful robe of words  
around you,*

*and sleep.*

*(pause)*

*Are we sleeping? Or are we awake?*

*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*