

*“Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him...”*

Jesus healed the sick. We hear that in the Gospel today. But there's another thing he does: He also casts out demons.

Now, if you read your bible carefully, you might notice that demons cause people to be unable to speak, cause seizures, make people run around naked, scream, cut themselves... They cause the person who suffers with them great personal anguish.

But.. But. Read that bible. Demons don't usually abuse other people, or steal, or kill others. Interesting.

Religious scholars tell us that the term “demons” was kind of a catch phrase for any illness or malady the people who lived 2000 years ago didn't understand. Epilepsy was considered to be caused by demons, as were mental illnesses such as depression, bi-polar disorder and schizophrenia.

But those scholars sometimes have a tough time convincing us. We've all seen those paintings and movies and TV shows! Everyone knows that demons are red and have sharp teeth, and they carry sharp weapons to jab us with.

They make us do things we wouldn't do. Right?

So—some of you may be thinking—she's not taking this seriously. She doesn't believe in demons. Some of you may be happy about that, and some of you may disapprove.

But I do believe in demons.

The definition of demon is: “an evil spirit, or an evil passion or influence.” OK. I'm getting that. Demons=Evil. So how does Webster's define “Evil”?

“Evil: something immoral; harmful; injurious.” So a demon can be any spirit – or unseen force--that can harm us, or makes us behave in immoral, harmful ways.

Oh yes, I believe in demons.

I believe demons are excellent shape-shifters and come in many forms.

*Episcopal priest and theologian Matthew Fox puts it this way:*

*“Evil is the shadow of angel. Just as there are angels of light, support, guidance, healing and defense, so we have experiences of shadow angels. And we have names for them: racism, sexism, homophobia are all demons - but they're not out there.”*

He's right. They're not out there. They're in here.

*Jesus tells us: “There is nothing outside a person which when entering them can make them unclean; but it is the things which come out of a person that makes them unclean.” (Mark 7)*

We carry these demons inside us. We sometimes even make room for them. Invite them in. And they're hard to get rid of once they come into our house.

Let's talk today about the Demon of Anger. Many religious writers call this the “top demon”. We've got our Top Gear, we've got our Top Dog—well this is Top Demon.

Oh, I'm not talking about anger which happens when someone hurts you in the moment—that's completely understandable. I'm talking about our anger at perceived ills against us which color the way we look at the world.

It's this type of anger that makes us say: “someone is taking something away from us.” This makes us righteously indignant.

The demon of anger is clever. It will try and make us think that we are only interested in the justice of the situation. The demon of anger certainly does NOT want us to think about the other person—what they might be feeling. No.

The demon of anger keeps us dwelling on our own hurt, our own lack of freedom, our own restriction. The demon wants us to believe that we are the wronged party, and the others are only interested in themselves.

But is that true? If we're honest, aren't we just interested in ourselves?

We're seeing a lot of this in our country right now. Look how we are all agitated and look at how it makes us want to stoke the fire of anger even hotter.

The Top Demon of Anger is very happy.

Why do we find ourselves angry all the time? Maybe we should ask ourselves—what do we fear? What are we afraid of seeing? What are we afraid of losing?

You know-- every doctor out there can tell you that people who are perpetually angry have a higher risk for heart attack and stroke.

So maybe it's time to pay attention to this particular demon. Instead of making excuses for it, let's look at it honestly, and ask it what its purpose is.

But watch out—demons are great at giving you the answers you want to hear.

I would prefer to have my demons healed. Wouldn't you?

We need to be open and honest enough with ourselves to really look at our demons. If we ask, Jesus will show us what they are. If we really want to know..

And then comes the hard part—we need to be willing to live without them. To let them go. That may not be as easy as it sounds. Sometimes we really love our demons.

That's why Jesus always asked what people really wanted before he healed them.

And when we're ready, when Jesus does heal us of those demons that harm us—and we are free and whole: I bet you anything we will be overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude, and we will feel suddenly lighter. And we'll say: thank you Lord- thank you so much. Now how may I serve YOU. Amen.