

Links for the Recording of the Service from January 31, 2021 and the Upcoming Service of February 7, 2021 are at the end of the News Blast.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE LINK FOR FEBRUARY 7 IS NEW!

Dear Members and Friends of Idylwood Presbyterian Church,

Pastoral announcements:

- This Sunday is Communion Sunday so remember to bring a juice-like substance and a bread-like substance (doesn't matter what they are, they are sacred in themselves for the purposes we use them for) to partake with at home!
- Wednesday February 17th we will have an Ash Wednesday Service. Pastor Maggie is preparing "Anointing of Ash kits" with everything included for you to anoint you and your families with ashes during the service. There will be multiple times made available where you will be able to come by the church parking lot and pick up your kits in a contactless way.
- Tuesday February 9th at 7pm Pastor Maggie will host a Zoom "Meet the Pastor" night. Anyone is welcome to drop in or stay awhile to ask any questions for Maggie, be it theological, silly, or simply to get to know more about who she is.
- If you would be interested in a 4-week video series about the season of Lent, email Pastor Maggie at Maggietaylor-smith@gmail.com. If a few or more are interested, Pastor Maggie will host a 4-week video series with conversation on the season of Lent on an evening that works for the most people.
- Lastly, If you are interested in keeping the Tuesday evening Bible Study going, let Pastor Maggie know and we can begin that again.

Please keep in your prayers:

- **Linda Dono's** friend, Rev. Tom Wade who died this morning. Rev. Wade was the father of Linda's dear college friend and served more than 60 years as Presbyterian minister. Please keep the Wade family, especially Rev. Wade's wife Betsy, in your prayers.
- **Linda Dono's** father-in-law, Joseph Petras, died of COVID-19 on January 23. Let us keep his family in our prayers.
- **Nancy Budny** broke her humerus bone in three places. The outpatient surgery went well.
- **Bob Osman's** brother Paul was hospitalized recently with blood clots in his lungs after a heart attack/surgery in December. Paul is home but still needs prayers.
- **Linda Dono's** aunt, Marge Dono Neuberger, who died December 20, of COVID-19.
- **Kate Untiedt** asks for prayers for her right eye, which is still not right.
- **Kate Untiedt's** colleague Nancy with cancer and a recent heart attack.
- **George Petras's** cousin Marlene with lung cancer.
- **Richard Williams' uncle** Bill Axline with cancer.
- **Danielle Moraes** dealing with a difficult work lawsuit.
- Prayers for a smooth transition in **Presidential administrations**.

- **All with COVID-19 or at risk:** medical, delivery, teachers and first responders.

Devotions from Pastor Maggie:

In this week's devotional, I am pulling from the scripture that happens right before where we will pick up on Sunday. I may not always do this but sometimes it's helpful to know what happens before the story we read for the full context. If you want to read the scripture on your own, this reflection comes from [Mark 1:21-28](#). In this scripture Jesus heals someone from a demon and I want to use it to show how often we associate ourselves with the bad things we have done or the mistakes we have made or our "demons". We forget that we have made these actions or had these thoughts but that we, ourselves are not these things. When we forget to make this distinction, we begin to feel a lot of shame and often that keeps us from loving ourselves and working towards what we deserve. Guilt can be a motivator but shame does not motivate us- it paralyzes us or causes us to go in a downward spiral.

Jesus' first act of ministry-the first thing that Jesus does is perform an exorcism- which is at the time not in itself that rare. I am amazed that Jesus' first act of ministry was to tend to a man who needed help, who needed to be set free. Jesus first order of business wasn't to preach a sermon or create the by-laws or head to the religious authorities to reveal who he was. His first order of business was to be with the people who needed him. Starting in the very next passage- Jesus goes on a healing streak.

One of the details that stood out to me in this passage was that when the unclean spirit speaks, first it speaks on behalf of **itself and the man**- it uses the pronoun "us" as if they are one. And then quickly changes to using the pronoun "I" when acknowledging that it knows that Jesus is the son of God. Here are those verses, ²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ "What have you to do with **us**, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

Sometimes I think we believe we are our unclean spirits- we believe we are our insecurities, our imperfections, our addictions, our negative feelings, our bad experiences. The unclean spirit uses the pronoun us- as if they are one. But they are not one and Jesus demands the unclean spirit to leave the man.

How often **We let our demons do the talking**

We all have our demons... addictions, mental health issues, insecurities, hurt from our pasts, all which imprison us to act like someone we don't want to act like. We all need to be exorcised of something...maybe multiple things. These things keep us from acting as we would want to, as we imagine ourselves acting. You know how you imagine how you want to come across, how you want to be perceived but then in reality you realize you come across completely different.

How can you free yourself from these demons- whatever they may be? How can you let God free

you of them? Begin by thinking what demons plague you and how you can not let them control your identity anymore.

Lectionary texts for 2-7-2021:

Isaiah 40:21-31

40:21 Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

40:22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in;

40:23 who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

40:24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

40:25 To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

40:26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?

40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

40:29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

40:30 Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

40:31 but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

147:1 Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

147:2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

147:3 He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

147:4 He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.

147:5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

147:6 The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.

147:7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.

147:8 He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills.

147:9 He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.

147:10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

147:11 but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

147:20c Praise the LORD!

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

9:16 If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!

9:17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted

with a commission.

9:18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

9:19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.

9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law.

9:21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law.

9:22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

9:23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Mark 1:29-39

1:29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

1:30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

1:31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

1:32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

1:33 And the whole city was gathered around the door.

1:34 And he 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.

1:35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

1:36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

1:37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

1:38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

1:39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Links for the Recording of the Service from 1-31-2021:

Topic: IPC Worship

Start Time : Jan 31, 2021 10:55 AM

Meeting Recording:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/HI636rWRtPyvuFnsk7j5GT31Rk9-iwOT1-BgfaKOT3ZdLYTvnryvDzyjfAQpgCk.jrM9lvvdNJ4zxtvd>

Access Passcode: **sRxI8.b0**

and the Upcoming Service of 2-7-2021 (NEW LINK):

Topic: IPC Worship

Time: Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Every week on Sun, until Jan 31, 2021, 2 occurrence(s)
Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM
Jan 31, 2021 10:30 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.
Weekly: https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmItyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshmPRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://zoom.us/j/97016933208?pwd=dFo0Z3duMi9sd0RvQ2p2VzY4ZEZBUT09>

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208
Passcode: **pcJY1z**
One tap mobile
+13017158592,,97016933208#,,,,*531963# US (Washington D.C)
+13126266799,,97016933208#,,,,*531963# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location
+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington D.C)
+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
+1 646 876 9923 US (New York)
+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)
+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208
Passcode: 531963
Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/aeAIYJfilT>

Sermon from 1-31-2021, including Lectionary texts on which it is based:

Mark 1:21-28

1:21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

1:22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

1:23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,

1:24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

1:25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

1:26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

1:27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching-

-with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

1:28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Jan 31 2021 IPC Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

Power and Authority

I want to reflect for a few minutes this morning on the nature of Jesus's authoritative presence, so powerful that people said that even unclean spirits convulsed the individual they inhabited and departed. Now, I know we usually don't use the language of unclean spirits to describe human behavior. Still, it's not an inappropriate way of portraying some of the addictive patterns into which we fall. Sometimes these patterns are so powerful that we mightily resist any calls to quit. Whether it is the kinds of addiction that have a physiological basis like alcoholism and smoking or those that seem to be purely psychological, we humans are prone to self-destructive activities.

I suspect we all could tell sad stories of people we know, in many cases right in our own families, of lives destroyed or at least not lived to their full potential, due to some form of addictive behavior. And maybe, I hope some of us could also tell the marvelous stories of people who were able to overcome their bad habits. Organizations like AA and the many clones dealing with other similar patterns are testimonies to the human spirit's ability to reform itself, with others' help and support.

But that is not my focus today. Today I want to reflect on the statement that Jesus had an *exousia*, a Greek word translated in NRSV as "authority," but also meaning "power." So, let's think about the concepts of authority and power. There are at least three kinds of authority.

1. When we elect a person to an office, we say that they have the authority of the office or official authority. Legally, the office confers upon them permission and even responsibility to do certain things.
2. The second kind of authority derives from knowledge and skills. Long time unusually competent practitioners command the respect of peers and society. Practitioners may include professionals such as doctors and lawyers as well as individuals who engage in trades.
3. The third kind of authority flows from moral and ethical stances. Individuals who maintain their principles over the long haul stand out. We have seen this kind of authority and its lack in recent weeks in our public life.

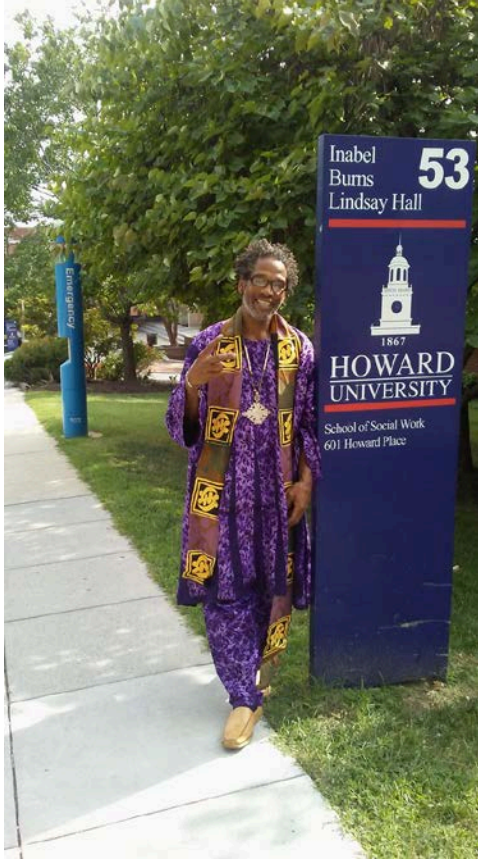
Authority and power are different. One can possess official authority, and be unable to act if people's confidence is lacking. That confidence often derives from moral authority. The authority of expertise similarly only manifests itself if people recognize the expertise. It takes time for this kind of authority to develop.

Moral authority extends and increases over time as people discern an individual's constancy.

Jesus had the second and third kinds of authority; he was a gifted teacher, and had unswerving moral convictions. The combination was potent. Recent events show the problems with power and authority unconnected to any moral sense.

I want to tell you about one person that, in my experience, has some of the same kind of authority and power that Jesus did. I think I've mentioned Sam Holloway to you before, from whom I learned about keeping bills in my pocket to give to the unhoused. Well, I want to tell you a little more about Sam. Many years ago, when he was a teenager, Sam went to prison for doing something that must have been very bad when he was 17. I don't know what it was, but it must have been terrible because he was at the famous Attica prison among others in NY for twenty years, many in solitary confinement. If that sort of experience does not make you crazy, it transforms you into an unusual person. During his years in prison, Sam spent time as a Muslim; He learned Arabic to read the Koran. Sam takes his religion very seriously. After he finished his Muslim phase, he became a Rastafarian. Sam ultimately returned to his Christian roots. And he taught others while locked up.

When Sam finally got out, he went to Richmond, VA, where he started working with the mayor on problems of people with AIDS and the unhoused. He became a street preacher. After several years in Richmond, he came to Washington, DC, entered the Divinity School, and ultimately received an MDiv degree. Before I go any further, I need to stop and tell you something else about Sam. Sam is the most sartorially remarkable person I think I've ever met. One day, Sam would show up at school in full bishop's regalia, including the mitered hat. Another day, he would be wearing Ethiopian garb. He usually wears an Ethiopian cross, as you'll see in the pictures. Yet another day, his attire would be an old-fashioned zoot-suit. He looked good in whatever he wore and had and has a tremendous sense of style. And did I say, Sam talks a mile a minute, full of energy, he's always very excited about life.





Since finishing Divinity School, Sam is again working with the unhoused, this time through an NGO in DC. When I worked at Garden Memorial Presbyterian Church in Anacostia, an unhoused man began camping in a cardboard box directly behind the church. The church's matriarch was not too happy about this, and I didn't know what to do. I was afraid she was going to call the police on this guy. Jeff reminded me that I should call our friend Sam, so I called Sam and he met me behind the church, both to try to help the man and see if we could get him to move down the street until Sam could make better arrangements for him. Sam ultimately found permanent housing and a job for him. Meanwhile, he agreed to move his box down the street so the matriarch would not be offended by his presence. A few other people had gathered by the time Sam arrived.

Anyway, it was amazing to see Sam at work. One moment he would be talking utterly earnest street language with these guys, letting them know in no uncertain terms that we had a deal and that they had better not break it. You could never pull the wool over his eyes. After many years in prison, he knew every trick in the book. But in the blink of an eye, we would be holding hands and praying together. It was the most incredible thing. Sam had street creds, but he also had spiritual credibility. He exercised powerful authority like few others. You can see that I love

Sam. He is my friend, and I admire him immensely. Very few people have been in my home during the pandemic, but Sam is one of them.

Sam's kind of power and authority cannot be learned in a book, though books are essential, and Sam absorbed much from books. Still, there are some things that books cannot teach us. Some things are discerned only from living on the underside of life. It doesn't get much more under than Attica prison.

Jesus also lived on the under-side. Born to a poor woman with a questionable father, so considered a *mamzer*, in a tiny country occupied by the mighty Roman empire, Jesus's prospects did not look great. Indeed, his life was short. He did not leave any writings, any children, any estate. Nevertheless, the spirit that filled Jesus was so strong that the ruling powers were threatened by him and wanted to get rid of him, but it did not work. Like the Proud Boys who thought that burning a Black Lives Matter sign would end the sentiment, killing Jesus only made what he stood for more potent.

So, where does all of this leave us? What are we to do with an understanding of Jesus's powerful authority? Jesus had something extraordinary, very unusual, formidable. The Episcopal theologian Carter Hayward thinks that he opened himself up to incarnation, and we can all do that if we will be vulnerable as Jesus was.

I don't think it is quite that simple, not that being vulnerable is simple. I mean that those who have the combination of power and authority are not usually people who have experienced life from a place of privilege. It might theoretically be possible to exchange our advantaged positions for those of margin and thus open ourselves to the kinds of experiences that would lead to unique insights. But let us not romanticize poverty either. Most poor people struggle to survive. Most do not become prophets and leaders. That special *exousia* only touches a few. And we can never lose the heritage with which we were born.

So, what are we to do? That is an individual matter, of course. The basics always stand. Follow a spiritual discipline, participate in a spiritual community, both for the fellowship and for the insights, and contribute your time, talent, and treasure, as you can to your church and the larger community. The more we give back, the richer our lives grow, and the more satisfaction we feel. Of course, that's not the point. As I suggested last week, even if we cannot all be fishers ourselves, we can feed the fishers. If we cannot be prophets, we can listen to and follow the prophets. If we cannot be leaders, let us follow the leaders. And sometimes, if we are open, we may discover that we have become a fisher or that our words carry a weight that we did not think possible. God uses whomever God chooses whenever, wherever, however. We need only be open.

And now, as I get ready to hand over the pastoral reins to Pastor Maggie, I want to say once again how much I have enjoyed being your virtual gap pastor for the last ten months. You all are a wonderful congregation. You work together very smoothly, everyone doing your part to make

the church function smoothly. I have learned so much, and I am grateful for the opportunity I have had this year to serve you. I only ask now that when you need a supply pastor to fill in for Pastor Maggie, you call me first so I can meet all of you F2F.