

Lesson Plans That Work
Year B – Fourth Sunday After Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for All

Scripture: Mark 1:21-28

Throughout the season of Epiphany, we follow Jesus' early ministry and calling of his disciples to be teachers, healers, leaders, and prophets proclaiming the Kingdom of God. In today's Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus healing a man possessed by demons. This is the first miracle story in the Gospel of Mark.

Note: This is the fourth in a four-part series on The Episcopal Church's refugee resettlement program, Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). Today's lesson asks us to reflect on Jesus' miracles of healing, its relationship to the Jewish-Christian prophetic tradition, and what it means to nurture a healing or prophetic presence in our own day.

Theme: The Prophetic Voice

Before: If possible, review and queue up the following video for use in your discussion:

- New Haven, CT – A Different Kind of Care (<http://vimeo.com/24232808>)

If you haven't yet explored the legal definition of "refugee" or The Episcopal Church's ministry of refugee resettlement, you may want to briefly explain prior to showing the short video.

The Episcopal Church has been engaged in loving service and advocacy on behalf of and alongside refugees for 75 years, dating to the late 1930's, as Jews and other groups fled Nazi Europe. The international legal definition of "refugee" was codified in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees:

[A refugee is a person who,] owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Today there are more than 50 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide, the highest number since World War II. Durable solutions for refugees include return to their home country when it is safe to do so, to integrate into the country of first asylum, or resettlement to a third country. Resettlement is the option pursued when the other two solutions are not possible. Less than 1% of the global refugee population will ever be resettled. The United States is the global leader in refugee resettlement, resettling more refugees each year than all other resettlement countries, combined. In fiscal year 2015, the United States will resettle 70,000 refugees. Of this number, Episcopal Migration Ministries, one of only nine refugee resettlement agencies in the US, will resettle more than 5,000 refugees from places like Syria, Nepal, Burma, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, and many other countries. Episcopal Migration Ministries works through a network of affiliate partners, who, in turn, work with the local community to ensure

successful resettlement and integration of new refugee neighbors. Schools, hospitals, employers, landlords, public transportation, law enforcement, community organizations, communities of faith and Episcopal congregations are all vital partners in resettlement.

If you would like to learn more about particular groups of people The Episcopal Church and other resettlement agencies resettle, you can find up to date statistics on the status of refugees in the world using this link: <http://www.unrefugees.org/>. Finally, if you have time, research the status of refugees in your community. Use the EMM network affiliate map to identify a resource in your area: <http://bit.ly/1swkPif>.

If you have questions, feel free to email or call Allison Duvall, EMM's program manager for church relations and engagement, at (212) 716-6027 or aduvall@episcopalchurch.org. She will be happy to assist you in enriching your lesson plan with information about Episcopal Migration Ministries and refugee resettlement.

Beginning: Welcome everyone as they arrive.

Opening Prayer: Loving God, we come together today to listen more deeply – for your voice and your presence in each of us. Open our hearts to see your presence in our lives, to see glimpses of your kingdom breaking through. Help us to see the miracles you work in our lives. Amen.

The Story: Mark 1:21-28

The Gospel reading appointed for today is an important one. And to understand its importance, let's imagine for a moment that we are hearing this story about Jesus for the first time. In the Gospel of Mark, the earliest-written canonical Gospel, dating to approximately 70 CE, we have only just met this person named Jesus. To this point in the Gospel, he has been introduced by John the Baptist. He has been baptized, which we read the first Sunday after the Epiphany. After the baptism scene, Jesus calls Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John to follow him. That's all – reading this story for the first time, we don't know much about Jesus, yet. To this point in Mark's Gospel, we have only learned a few details about this mysterious, compelling character. And, as far as we know, the 1st century Palestinian public has not learned much about Jesus yet, either. This is what makes today's reading so important – it is character exposition, not only for us as readers. It is Jesus' self-introduction, the beginning of his public ministry. People are just beginning to meet Jesus and learn what he is about. And the event recounted in this story certainly sets the stage for Jesus' public ministry. Read Mark 1:21-28. (You may choose to invite a young person to read the Gospel to the group so they feel included.)

Reflection Questions:

Gather the class into table groups that reflect the diversity of the group gathered (mix ages, genders, and identities). Ask each group to be intentionally about including all voices in the conversation. Ask them to discuss:

- What strikes you about this reading?
- How do you think the people in the story reacted? What did they think when they saw Jesus heal the man? What would you have done?
- What are the implications of this reading in terms of who we, as followers of Jesus, are called to be in the world?

Activity:

The Episcopal Church has engaged in refugee resettlement ministry as an expression of our faith and our prophetic tradition since the late 1930's, when the Church welcomed those fleeing Nazi Europe. The stories of refugees arriving in our country and the experiences of those who welcome them are stories brimming with the promise of the resurrection, the promise that life conquers death, that hope conquers fear. They are also stories of healing – of the body, the mind, the heart, and the spirit. They are stories of miracles, not unlike the one we read about today in the Gospel.

Let's hear one of these stories now.

Watch the video:

- New Haven, CT – A Different Kind of Care (<http://vimeo.com/24232808>)

Reflection Questions:

- What did this story stir up in you? What struck you?
- In the Gospel reading, where Jesus introduces his public ministry through an act of healing, of restoring a person to wholeness of body and inclusion in the community. How are we to be healers? How are we to bring others to wholeness of body, mind, and spirit?
- How could your congregation participate in the healing work of refugee resettlement? What gifts and skills are in your congregation that may be given as an offering, glorifying God and embracing newly arriving refugee families?

Closing:

A theme that connects the Gospel reading and The Episcopal Church's ministry of refugee resettlement is the theme of 'belonging,' the need to belong. This can also be understood as wholeness. A sense of belonging – to a community that warmly embraces you – brings peace and wholeness. In Jesus' healing miracle, the man is restored to wholeness, to belonging. In refugee resettlement, those who have been displaced, who have fled for their lives, who have felt that they belonged nowhere in the world, have found a place of safety. It is the work of the Church and our communities to embrace newly arriving refugees and immigrants, to let them know this new place is one of belonging. Of healing. They are home.

Let us close through a group reading of A Blessing "For Belonging" from *"To Bless The Space Between Us"* by John O'Donohue. (Leader may decide how to do the reading – each individual can read a line, or the lines could be read responsively.)

May you listen to your longing to be free.

May the frames of your belonging be generous enough for your dreams.

May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart.

May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.

May the sanctuary of your soul never become haunted.

May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.

May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.

May you never place walls between the light and yourself.

May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging.

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 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." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Written by Allison Duvall

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Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee resettlement agency of The Episcopal Church, welcomes thousands of refugees each year from conflict zones across the globe. Working in partnership with offices and groups within the church as well as with governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), and a network of 30 affiliate offices in 26 dioceses, Episcopal Migration Ministries provides vital services for thousands of refugee families upon their arrival in the United States.

In 2015, Episcopal Migration Ministries is celebrating 75 years of refugee resettlement in The Episcopal Church through the year-long #ShareTheJourney campaign. #ShareTheJourney is a multi-media effort to educate, form, and equip Episcopalians to engage in loving service with resettled refugees and to become prophetic witnesses and advocates on behalf of refugees, asylees, migrants, and displaced persons the world over.

