

Sermon for Year B Epiphany IV  
January 29, 2006  
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC  
The Rev. Jeanne Finan

### **My Brother Jesus**

There I was.  
Standing in the checkout line on Saturday morning at Harris Teeter.  
Waiting.  
I think at least half of Watauga County shops at Harris Teeter on Saturday morning.  
I wasn't in the best of moods anyway--  
and then I saw it.  
*People* magazine. Right there by the cash register.  
And there he was—in full living color, right on the cover!  
My brother,  
my brother Jesus--  
with a headline in bold purple type that read,  
*Jesus talks to Demons! Fame spreads throughout Galilee!*

What next, Jesus!??  
The National Enquirer?!

I wanted to melt into the floor.  
Boy! Was I glad that our mother had not come shopping with me that morning.  
She is worried enough about that brother of mine.  
And now this!!

You know that collect, that prayer we prayed at the beginning of this service--  
*grant us your peace through Jesus...*  
Ha! I want to say to whoever wrote that prayer. Ha!  
Peace?!?! Through Jesus?  
You must be kidding.  
That brother of mine is not exactly walking around talking to demons and bringing peace.  
He is upsetting a lot of people. A lot of people.  
Including his own family.

Now our mother always defends him.  
She adores him.  
When we start complaining about our brother Jesus,  
she gives us a look...well, if you have a mother,  
you KNOW that look!!  
She starts quoting scripture, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet..."  
Mother!! Please!! I do not think that the scripture was talking about Jesus!  
That's when I decide I'll just leave the house and go do the grocery shopping.  
By myself!

Okay, I have to tell you the truth.

I bought that issue of People magazine.  
I know, I know, it's total trash.  
    But I wanted to see what they were saying about my brother.

After I put my groceries in the car,  
    I sat there and read the article.  
It sounded innocent enough at the beginning...  
    My brother and some of his buddies (he can't ever seem to go anywhere alone these days)  
        went to Capernaum and when the Sabbath came he went to the synagogue.  
Now that's not a shock.  
My brother Jesus has always loved hanging around the rabbis and the scrolls.  
You'd be amazed at how much scripture he can just say from memory.

I guess the trouble started because he wasn't there to listen.  
He was there to talk!  
Now, as his sister, that doesn't surprise me either.  
That boy can talk up a storm.  
    He's been talking and talking and talking ever since I can remember.  
    It's like he's hurrying to say everything because he doesn't have much time.  
    *What's the rush?* my other brothers ask him.  
    Slow down.  
    But he doesn't.

So according to People magazine, my brother Jesus goes to the synagogue on the sabbath  
    and starts to teach.  
Trust me. When Jesus talks, people listen.  
There's just something about him.  
Now you may not like what you hear.  
You may not like him.  
But you listen.

Okay, so he's talking and teaching and people are getting mad—  
none of that is all that new, you know.  
But then real trouble walks in the door!

A man comes in and he is loud and obnoxious and rowdy  
    screaming and yelling and shouting that he knows who Jesus really is  
    and he's saying my brother is the Holy One of God.  
Well, that about sends the scribes and the Pharisees into cardiac arrest.

But you know something?  
This is something I love about my brother.  
He doesn't freak out.  
He doesn't get defensive or yell back or turn his back and ignore the man.  
Now me? If there is a conflict, I am out the door!

I don't like confrontations.

It is so much easier  
to just pretend that everything is just fine, just fine, just fine.

My brother Jesus is different.

He always speaks directly to people, whoever they are, wherever you are.  
He will come up to you and stand right in front of you and look into your eyes.  
It's why some people don't want anything to do with Jesus.

But it's not like he's trying to make you back down  
or to scare you.

It's like he wants to really, really see you.  
When Jesus looks at you it as if he is looking right into your heart.  
(No wonder some people don't want anything to do with him!!)

But back to *People* magazine...

Jesus goes right up to this crazy, wild screaming man, so the article says,  
and speaks to him so firmly and so sharply and says,  
K *Be silent.*

And the man is.

And then....

Jesus tells the unclean spirit that is torturing this man to come out.  
And the demon does come out.  
The demon comes out crying with a loud voice.  
And then the man,  
the man sinks to the floor of the synagogue  
And the man cries.  
Not loud and screaming like he was before,  
But weeping, sobbing.  
Because he is free at last.

That's what *People* magazine says happened in Capernaum.

Well, there was one more line:

They wrote, "Jesus' spiritual charisma seems to be getting under some people's skin."  
I didn't like it that they said that about my brother.

I read the article three times, maybe four.  
I didn't really understand the part about the demons.

So the next time Jesus is home, I get up really early.  
(Not as early as my brother ...but almost.)

I find him sitting here in the church.

Yes, right here.

He comes here to pray—and he likes to sit in that pew by the window with the little children.  
The church is dark. Only a few candles for light.

I slip into the pew beside him and sit there.

Finally, I get up my courage and I ask him.

*Brother, I don't understand what you mean by unclean spirits and demons?*

Jesus turns and looks at me, smiles and says,

*I think my friend C.S. Lewis says it pretty well... (My brother knows everybody!!)*

*Jack (that's what C.S. lets his good friends call him)...*

*Jack says, there's a "God-size hole" in each of us,  
a longing, an emptiness that only God can fill.*

*A hole?*

*I ask.*

*Yes, a God-size hole--*

*only we keep trying to stuff other things in there.*

*God gets crowded out. Suffocated almost.*

*What sort of stuff? I ask him.*

*You wouldn't believe it., says my brother.*

*He starts to name some of the things...*

*...work, alcohol, food,*

*self-righteousness (boy! That one sure takes up a lot of room!!)*

*gossip, anger,*

*judgment, jealousy...*

*Wow! I say. No wonder God doesn't have any room.*

*Sister,*

*people will try to put almost anything but God into that space!*

*They feel empty because of their deep longing for God,*

*yet they keep filling God's space with false comforts.*

*Oh, sure all those things will give you that zip-a-dee-doo-dah sensation of fullness,*

*of satisfaction, of control.*

*But not for long*

*and not for real.*

*And eventually it gets so crowded, so dark inside,*

*there's no room for God and no room for anyone else.*

*There's no room even for your self.*

*That hole becomes a prime breeding ground*

*for all those things to grow into demons.*

*The demons that start out so harmless, take over all the space and*

*start to eat you from the inside out.*

*Yet even when God tries to chase the demons out,*

*we are often the ones that run after them,*

*shouting, " Oh honey! Come back! Come back!*

*I'll make room for you. You can stay!"*

I understand what my brother is saying.  
I understand why he confronted that man in the synagogue.

You have to really love someone  
to want their demons to be destroyed, to be cast out.

We get as comfortable with other people's demons  
as we get with our own.  
Maybe even more so.  
We turn our heads and look away and keep on walking.

You have to really love someone  
to want their demons to be destroyed, to be cast out.

I may not be my brother's keeper,  
but I am my brother's sister.

And the one thing in the world I know  
is that whatever happens,  
my brother loves me.  
Actually, my brother Jesus loves every one.

But I think that's pretty cool,  
because I love my brother, too.