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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (Series C)

January 31, 2016

Text: Luke 4:31–44

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You would have thought that Jesus would have learned His lesson after the debacle that followed His first sermon. Do you remember what happened last week? The hometown boy returned to Nazareth with much anticipation from the townsfolk. He was to lead the synagogue worship. He read from Isaiah 61 and proclaimed that He was the one Isaiah spoke of, the one who was to bring liberty to captives, to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The crowd's reaction began well enough. But then that insidious "familiarity of contempt" did its devilish work. When it was all said and done, they –the hometown folks – drove Jesus out of the synagogue and to the brink of the cliff upon which the town was built. They meant to throw Jesus over! Such was the murderous rage of the "good folks of Nazareth."

You would have though Jesus had learned His lesson that Biblical preaching is dangerous work. Best not to rile up the folks too much, too soon. So Jesus heads northeast of Nazareth to the seacoast town of Capernaum. He goes there and preaches His second sermon. That crowd too was astonished at Jesus' preaching "for his word possessed authority" Luke declares in vs. 32. All well and good.

But things go downhill again from there. The trouble this time came from somewhere else, a most unlikely source: a demon possessed man! Vs. 33–34, "And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! 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.'" Now that's an uncanny turn of events.

Demons in church! Who would have thought such a thing? Our communion liturgy reminds us weekly that we worship with angles, archangels, and all the company of heaven. But our Satanic foes? Yes, they too are interested in what happens in church.

Martin Luther famously said that wherever God builds a church the devil builds a chapel.

In other words, we shouldn't be all that surprised that our enemy concerns himself with what we believe, teach, and confess. Did not the apostle Peter write to the Christians of the 1st century saying, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (I Pe 5:7–8). The apostle Paul admonished the 1st century Ephesian Christians to put on the whole armor of God. You may remember the equipment listed: the belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the gospel of peace, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and, above all, the shield of faith so that we may be able to quench every flaming dart of the evil one. And having been so clothed, we are to stand firm in the evil day (Eph. 6:13–20). It's not as if we take off this divine equipment when we go to Church. Our entire life is one of standing firm against the devil, his evil horde, and the fallen corruption of this world and our sinful flesh.

What's most important for us and our salvation, however, is what Jesus does! He rebuked the demon. Not the demon-possessed man, but the demon itself. Our warfare is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, and cosmic forces in this present evil age. Jesus said to the demon, "Be silent and come out of him!" (vs. 35) All the demon could do was make a big fuss, nothing more significant than a two-year old temper tantrum. Luke records, "And when the demon had thrown him (demon-possessed man) down in their midst, he (the demon) came out of him, having done him no harm" (vs. 35).

That's what we need to hear today and remember as we stand firm, clad in the armor of God, resisting that roaring lion of a devil. He can do us no harm when Jesus' strong name covers us. No matter what trial or affliction comes our way, the Lord Jesus rebukes Satan and claims us as His own precious children who are redeemed by His death and resurrection, having been cleansed by His precious blood. The Bible even promises us that Jesus will work all things for our good. The Lord's claim over our lives is so complete, that even the evil we endure is used by Jesus to bring about our good. With Jesus on our side, the devil can't help but be used by Jesus as a pawn in service of our greater good and ultimate glory. Our victory in Christ is absolute and complete.

The people of Capernaum are utterly amazed. By the sheer authority of His word, Jesus rebukes the demon, casts him out, and restores the man to complete wholeness. This man Jesus speaks authoritatively. The grapevine begins to work according to vs. 37, “And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.”

Things settle down for a few moments. After the drama of the synagogue service, Jesus and His disciples go to the house of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, probably for lunch. What they find is a sick woman laid up in bed with a high fever. They didn’t have medications to speak of in those days. Fevers were cause for great concern. So they ask Jesus to heal her. If He can cast out a demon with the power and authority of a spoken word, maybe He can heal a fever. And sure enough, Jesus does just that. Listen to how Luke describes what Jesus did to Peter’s mother-in-law’s while remembering what Jesus did to the demon-possessed man in the synagogue service. Vs. 39, “And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.”

Notice two things here. First, Jesus rebuked the fever. That’s the same word Luke used to describe what Jesus did to the demon. He rebuked it. To Jesus, demons and human sickness are treated as one and the same. Both are the effects of God’s creatures rebelling against His love and grace. Demons rebelled against God and fell from grace. We human beings, going all the way back to Adam and Eve’s original sin, rebel against God’s love. Sickness and disease are the outward effects of man’s sin. The reason we get sick is because we are sinners subject to the corruption of this fallen world. But the root cause is all the same: rebellion against God. Jesus rebukes, that is, He silences, chastises, and corrects the sickness as He did the demon in the synagogue. He has authority and power to rebuke demons, sickness, disease, and ultimately, death itself.

Second, though Luke doesn’t say that the fever left Peter’s mother-in-law “having done her no harm” – that’s what he said about the demon-possessed man in the synagogue – the fever leaves her all the same without doing any harm. Luke writes, “it (i.e., fever) left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.” She gets up in full health, ready and eager to provide Jesus, Peter, and the rest of the disciples the food they need. The fever had done her no harm because of Jesus’ healing authority.

That too we need to hear. What I said earlier about our ultimate victory over demons is also true over sickness and disease. The Bible claims that sickness and physical

affliction, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Our heavenly Father promises to work through those things too to bring about our ultimate good and glorious salvation. Jesus' redemptive death on Calvary and His resurrection from the dead on the third day provides the absolute certainty that nothing in heaven and on earth can separate us from God's love and glory promised to us. Not the spiritual forces of evil located in Satan and His demons. Not sickness, affliction, or disease. Not even death. Jesus rebukes them all to such extent that we can rightly say, in faith, they have done us no harm!

Lest we miss this fact, Luke combines both physical and spiritual healing in vs. 40–41. What happened at the synagogue and at Peter's mother-in-law's house, now takes place on a larger scale. Jesus heals diseases and rebukes demons. For Him, they're one and the same.

But Jesus is not content to do this gracious work in one location only. Our Lord tells the people of Capernaum who were looking for Him, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (vs. 43). That preaching ministry, which began in Nazareth (last week), continued throughout Judea and Israel, all the way to the Good Friday and Easter. And through His Church, the good news of God's kingdom continues to be preached to the world. To Burns/Kimball, we hear the saving truth: Jesus has authority over every form of evil. In Christ, they are defeated, having done us no harm.

Thanks be to God and glory in the highest to the Lord Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.