

Text: Luke 4:31-44

Jesus Must Preach?

The Gospel for today shows Jesus being very busy, preaching, teaching and healing. Just before this though Jesus had been in his hometown synagogue and was also preaching and teaching, but there was no healing. In fact the people there had tried to kill Jesus. Tried to throw him over a cliff and do him in. But now Jesus is in Capernaum preaching and teaching in the synagogue again about the refreshing word of good news from God's word. There in the synagogue he silenced a meddlesome demon, much to the delight and praise of the people. Shortly after that He puts in a visit at Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was under the weather with a fever. He stands over her, rebukes the fever (just as He rebukes the demons), and the fever lets go of her and she arises from her sick bed to make lunch for them.

Soon word of Jesus' miracle working gets out, and a huge crowd of people with all sorts of diseases and demons gathers on the front lawn. Jesus works all night healing the sick, casting out demons, silencing their attempts to tell everyone who He is. By sunrise He's exhausted and goes off to be alone somewhere. The people try to get Him to stay, because this sure beats dealing with the doctors. But Jesus says, "I have to preach the good news of the kingdom of God in other towns too," and leaves at least some of the diseased and demonized people behind. He was sent to preach he tells them, because that's why the Father sent Him.

Jesus had come to preach. He came specifically to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God was present in Him. The King had come and His Name is Jesus. He is the Lord, the Creator and Redeemer of the world. The Healer behind all healing, the One who turns water to wine, who casts out demons with a word, who rebukes fevers and heals diseases, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. He is God in the flesh, making His grand appearance. Walking with us visibly once again as he did with Adam and Eve at the beginning before sin entered the world. He is the good news that God is merciful and forgiving and gracious and healing and compassionate.

You see Jesus isn't simply a preacher delivering a sermon. He is the sermon. He's God's sermon to the world. He was sent to preach good news. Not the bad news of religion and politics. Not the bad news of how you can earn your own way to get right with God. Good news of pardon for the prisoners. Sight for the blind, hearing for the deaf, speech for the mute, forgiveness for sinners, life for the dead. Good news that is fulfilled when you hear it. News so good it ought to tingle your ears and even your toes. You are reconciled to God in the death of His Son. You are free - free from the commandments that condemn you, free from death that dogs you, free from the demons that terrorize you, free from the diseases that threaten you. Free from anything that binds you - your past, your present, even your future. Nothing can harm you, because the King holds your life in His hands.

The miracles Jesus did were visible manifestations of the kingdom's presence in the King. Jesus preached the kingdom and He made the kingdom present, visible, in the miracles that He did. When Jesus stooped down over the bed of Simon's mother-in-law, and stayed out on the front porch all night to heal the diseased and demonized people of Capernaum, He was showing visibly what was hidden but always true about Him. That He is the Creator and the Redeemer of the world. The demons knew who He is and are

all too eager to broadcast. “We know who you are, the Holy One of God. The Son of God. The Christ.” Those devils are the only ones who seem to understand who Jesus is. Everyone else - the religious types, the theologians, the crowds, the disciples, even Jesus’ own family - have a hard time believing it. But those demons know who Jesus is, and they shudder in the presence of the King.

The miracles are as much gifts to us as they are gifts to those who received them. And maybe even more, because they continue to work faith in the hearts of those who hear long after the miracle itself has ended. Simon’s mother-in-law most likely got sick again in her life. Jesus didn’t make her immune to other disease. And one day she died, just like one day each of us will die. But that fever-healing miracle reminded her, and it reminds us, who we need to trust in the hour of our death. The One who rebukes demons and diseases with a word is the One who defeated death once for all in His death. The real good news is that Jesus is not just a preacher or even a miracle worker, but that he is the everlasting sacrifice for sin and death. Three years after this whirlwind tour in Galilee Jesus would suffer the pains of crucifixion. He would bleed, suffocate and bear the agony of hell for all of us. On a hill called Golgotha, the skull, he would be the lamb of God who takes away our sins and the sins of the whole world.

There are some truths we can discern in these miracles. First, these are personal miracles. Jesus doesn’t do mass healings. There may be a crowd, but it’s a crowd where each person is dealt with individually, personally. Remember the woman with a hemorrhage who tried to sneak up on Jesus and just touch the hem of His robe. But Jesus would have none of that. No matter how big the crowd, He touches each and every one of them. He heals them one at a time, even if it takes all night to do it.

He bends over the bed of Simon’s mother-in-law, He seeks her, pays her a house call, comes to her side. That moment when Jesus stood over her, she had the undivided attention of the Lord and Creator of the universe. For us the moment the baptismal water poured over you in God’s Name, or that moment you hear the word of forgiveness in absolution addressed to you, or that moment the body and blood of Jesus touches your lips and His words given and shed for you ring in your ears, you have the same undivided attention of Jesus who deals person to person with each of us.

When people speak of Christ as a “personal Lord and Savior” they have the right idea. Baptism is a very personal thing - the Triune God personally addressing you by name. Absolution is a very personal thing. The Lord’s Supper is a very personal thing His body and blood given and shed for you, calling you to trust Him. There is no cafeteria style, corporate time management efficiency for our Lord. He deals personally and individually with each one of us, because each of us is precious to Him.

Second, the miracles show us something about the nature of disease. Jesus rebukes disease in precisely the same way as he did the demons. That’s because disease is as foreign to us as the demons. Demons, disease, death. They’re all the outcome of the Fall. Adam and Eve let death into the web of creation. And we’ve had to live with it ever since. Every cold, every sniffle, every flu, every cancer cell and every clogged artery is a sign of our death, a reminder that we are born in a dying and decaying world of sin. Every healing is a miracle because Jesus, the creative Word, lies under every healing and is the sign that life, not death, is our final destiny in Christ.

It isn’t God’s will that we be harrassed by disease and devils until the day we die. It isn’t God’s will that cells turn cancerous and arteries clog and blood vessels pop in

stroke victim's brain. These aren't God's punishment for sin either. God dealt with the sin of the world in the death of Jesus. Certainly there are consequences for sin. Abuse alcohol, and your liver will rot. Abuse drugs and you'll mess up both your body and your mind. But don't blame God for that. He's already warned you not to stick your hand in the fire.

It's one consequence of sin that a cell in your brain goes berserk, or a stray virus goes up your nose, or a stray bullet hits you instead of the intended victim but it's not a personal punishment. God hasn't made us free from pain and suffering, God has made us free from death. He uses the viruses, the cancer cells, the bullets, and whatever else kills us, to work our salvation which was won for us in the death of Jesus. He's telling us what He's telling everyone in the world, that is, repent trust him for salvation – die to sin and trust His crucified and risen Son.

Healing wasn't why Jesus was sent. Preaching was his main purpose. He was sent to preach, and the miracles were simply extensions object lessons of His preaching. Faith understands that Jesus has already healed all the sick and demonized, not only in Capernaum, but also in the world. He healed them in His own sacrifice on the cross. "By His wounds we are healed." In Christ, the fever is broken, the demons are silent, there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more cancer or heart disease. Yes, for this present moment, we will suffer these things. We will all die in this world. No matter how many miracles may come our way in this life, no matter how many times we get well, one day we won't. But it isn't that Jesus failed us. The victory has been ours all along in Christ. In Him we died, we rose, we ascended, we're seated at the right hand of God. Our redemption is finished.

We understand that Jesus' healings are little signs, sacraments, of the resurrection. Luke uses the resurrection word twice in this story. Jesus rises from the synagogue to enter Simon's house. And Simon's mother-in-law rises from her sick bed to serve them. Healings are little resurrections, visible signs of what Jesus will do on the Last Day, and what He's already done in His own resurrection. In Christ, you've already risen, even when you're flat on your back in the ICU at the mercy of the doctors. You're alive in Christ, your life is hidden in Christ. He is your resurrection, He is your life. If we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord.

Remember that our final and complete healing is just around the corner. In just a few minutes Jesus' own body and blood, will be given to you personally. His death and life are given to us in exchange for our death and life. And there is no greater miracle than that.