

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord
31 January 2010, Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO
Text Luke 431—44

The Preacher and the Sermon

In our day and age, preaching too often has turned into the mere dispensing of advice, often without any difference than advice given by Dear Abby or Dear Ann Landers, or Dr. Phil. Ask anyone on the street or on whatever show that Jay Leno has, and preaching will almost always be seen as something negative and boring. “Don’t preach to me,” the adolescent says to the preachy parent. The beginning of the sermon has the same effect of hitting the snooze alarm.

How different from our puny concepts of preaching is the sermon and preaching of Jesus! In today’s Gospel text, Jesus is in Capernaum at the synagogue where He silences a meddlesome demon, much to the delight and praise of the people. Jesus then stops at Simon’s house, where Simon’s mother-in-law is under the weather with a high fever. Jesus looks in on her, stands over her, and rebukes the fever (just as He has rebuked the demon). The fever leaves her and she rises from her sick bed to make sandwiches for lunch.

It doesn’t take long for word to get out and a huge crowd of people with all sorts of diseases and demons turns the front yard of the house into a hospital waiting room. Jesus works from sunset well into the night to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to silence their attempts to tell everyone who He is. By sunrise Jesus is exhausted, longing to go off by Himself alone. But the crowds keep Him from leaving. They want Him to keep on with the healing, but Jesus states, **“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for**

this purpose.” And off He goes for the next town, leaving behind a bunch of diseased and demonized people. Jesus goes on to preach—that’s why the Father sent Him, and probably not give advice for better living.

Jesus came to preach, to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God is present in Him. The King has come and His name is Jesus, the Lord, the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Jesus is the Healer behind all healing, the One who turns water into wine, who casts out demons with a word, who rebukes fevers, and heals disease. Jesus is God in the flesh, making His grand appearance, walking with us visibly. Jesus is the good news that God is merciful, forgiving, gracious, healing, and compassionate. You see, Jesus is not simply a preacher delivering a sermon; He *is* the sermon, God’s sermon to the world. He was sent to preach good news, not the bad news of religion and politics. He is sent to preach the good news of pardon for prisoners, sight for the blind, hearing for the deaf, speech for the mute, forgiveness for sinners, life for the dead. And it is Good News that is fulfilled when you hear it. It is the Good News that you and I are reconciled to God in the death of His Son. You are 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, your future. You are safe because the King holds your life in His hands.

Those miracles that Jesus did that day are signs of the kingdom, visible manifestations of the kingdom’s presence in the King. Jesus preached the kingdom and He made it manifest, visible, in the miracles He did. Today we call it all Word and Sacrament, the preached Word and the visible Word. Sermon and supper, or sermon and healing.

As Jesus stooped over the bed of Simon's mother-in-law and as He stayed out in the front yard turned hospital waiting room all night, He was showing visibly what was hidden but always true about Him—that face that He is the Creator and Redeemer of the world. The demon in today's Gospel knew that fact: **“I know who You are—the Holy One of God.”**

The miracles of Jesus are a visible word, signs of His presence. They are not so much a suspension of the laws of nature as they are visible manifestations that Jesus is who He says He is. Miracles reveal something about Jesus. The miracles are not the pattern for how Jesus works, so they should not feed our expectations. Rather, miracles give us a glimpse of the world's Creator and Redeemer. Instead of expecting miracles, we can learn from them, 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, and one day died, just as each of us will die. But her miracle reminded her as it does us about whom to trust in the hour of death. The One who rebukes demons and diseases with a word is the One who defeated death once for all in His death.

By the way, did you notice that the miracles in today's text are personal miracles, not mass healings. There may be a crowd, but it's a crowd where each person is dealt with individually, personally. Jesus bends over the bed of Simon's mother-in-law with His undivided attention. It's much the same as the moment baptismal water is poured over you in God's name, the moment you hear the word of forgiveness in absolution addressed to you, the moment the body and blood of Jesus touch your lips and His words ring in your ears—at those moments you have the same undivided attention of the Word who made all things and upholds all things in Himself. Baptism is a very personal thing—the Triune God personally addressing you by name. Absolution is a

very personal thing with God forgiving you your sins. The Lord's Supper is a very personal thing with His body and blood given and shed for you. Our Lord deals personally and individually with each of us, because each of us is precious to Him.

The miracles in today's text show us something about the nature of disease. Remember how Jesus deals with the fever of Simon's mother-in-law—He rebukes it. That's same word Luke uses for what Jesus does with the demon. Jesus rebukes disease precisely in the same way He rebukes the demons, and disease and demons respond in the same way, because disease is as foreign to us as the demons. Demons, disease, death are all the same to Jesus—they are all a result of the Fall. Since the time of Adam and Eve, every human being has had to live with a death sentence—ours. Every cold, sniffle, flu, cancer cell, clogged artery is a sign of our death, a reminder that we are born dead, falling into death every moment of our lives. The miracle of healing given by Jesus is the sign that life, not death, is our final destiny in Him. None of these diseases or devils are God's will for us, nor are they God's punishment for sin either. God dealt with the sin of the world in the death of Jesus. Yes, there may be consequences for sin, but God has taken care of the punishment.

The question has probably already popped up in your mind: If Jesus is so pro-life, why didn't He just heal everyone on the spot? Why did He turn His back on all the sick and demonized people in Capernaum to go on to other towns? In fact, why doesn't God just wipe out all disease today?

The short answer is that Jesus was sent to preach; miracles were simply extensions of His preaching. Miracles were not the main event. Jesus is not into repairing all things old; He is into making all things new. The long answer is that in His death, Jesus did heal all the sick and

demonized, not just those in Capernaum, as Isaiah recorded (53:5): **“With His stripes we are healed.”** 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. And it won’t be as though Jesus failed us.

The victory has been ours all along in Christ. In Him we died, in Christ we rose, in Him we ascended, in Him we are seated at God’s right hand. It is all finished in Christ. Jesus has not neglected the others who are sick. On the last day, on the day of resurrection, what Jesus did for Simon’s mother-in-law and for the people of Capernaum, He will do for all once and for all—he will raise us from the dead. Resurrection is the direction to which all healing points.

Resurrection is what healings are signs of. Healings are little resurrections, visible signs of what Jesus will do on the Last Day, and what He has already done in His own resurrection. For in Christ, you are already risen, even when you’re flat on your back in the ICU at the mercy of physicians and HMOs. You are alive in Christ, your life is hidden in Christ. He is your resurrection, your life. **“If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”** (Romans 14:8-9).

That’s the sermon that Jesus is—the Word made flesh for you, for your life, for your resurrection.

Thanks to Rev. Bill Cwirla for the direction and shape of this sermon.

Henry V. Gerike