

## Luke 4:31-44

Epiphany 4C + February 3, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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No Contest

The Word of the Lord from Luke 4:42-43: "And when it was day, He departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought Him and came to Him, and would have kept Him from leaving them, but He said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

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

I fear that the Lord has ruined superhero movies for me. Despite the rather predictable plot line, I usually enjoy them: it's one of the few genres where the lines between good and evil are clearly drawn, and where the good triumphs over evil in service to humanity. I like that, and the dramatic struggle between good and evil can make for a fun two-hour ride, especially with a bucket of popcorn.

The thing with superhero movies, though, is that it takes two hours, if not a sequel, to defeat the enemy. Those two hours are full of dire emergencies and near disasters. Victory only comes after near defeat and plenty of destruction: if the big fight takes place in a big city, there's going to be a lot of devastation. Then again, according to their background, superheroes are usually demigods: they're more powerful than human beings, but they're far from all-powerful. You can never be sure that the victory is won for good: there's always the chance that a villain appears who is more super than Superman, more wondrous than Wonder Woman or more ... batty than Batman.

In contrast to these make-believe saviors of mankind, behold Jesus. In our text, He's confronted by a man with the spirit of an unclean demon (in the synagogue of all places!) and the demon puts up quite a fuss. He cries 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." It's very kind of the demon to confess the deity of Jesus, by the way, though it has little choice when confronted by the Christ. Nevertheless, an unclean spirit is still an unclean spirit, and so Jesus rebukes it and says, "Be silent and come out of him!" The demon throws the man to the ground like a bully giving his victim one last shove, but then he leaves without causing any harm.

There's no epic battle, no broken furniture and no swelling soundtrack. Jesus and the demon don't spend twenty minutes hurling balls of lightning at each other, or shooting destructo-rays from their eyeballs. It may be even less dramatic than you think: while the English has an exclamation mark at the end of Jesus' command, the Greek doesn't. It's entirely possible that Jesus casts him out with a normal, conversational voice. Imagine no drama, no shouting, just "Be silent and come out of him." Whatever the Savior's tone, it's no contest. The demon leaves.

Then it's off to Simon's house, where Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever. You know how viruses work: they're going to stick around until they're gone. You can lower the fever with ibuprofen and make yourself more comfortable, but fighting a virus is all about waiting it out and praying it leaves no lasting damage. You can say, "I wish this would go away" all you want, but wishing doesn't make it so. You can't even get rid of a common cold.

Thus this miracle is nothing to ... sneeze at. However, Jesus stands over this feverish woman, tells the fever to go away and *it does*. Immediately! She gets up and starts to serve them, fully healthy. Jesus speaks fevers away, and it's no contest.

Two miracles like that would be a good day's work, but Jesus is only getting started. As the sun sets, those who are sick with various diseases are brought to Him, and He heals them. He casts out many demons, silencing them as He does so. There's no point in the text where He confronts some disease and says, "This one's going to be tricky." There's no record that He ever says, "I've got to take a break and recharge My power." Once again, there's no evidence that He raises His voice. He could rebuke like He was asking for more coffee at a restaurant: "Demon, go away." "Leprosy, be gone." "Cancer, be healed." "Arrhythmic heart, beat normally." And like Peter's mother-in-law, these people are fully restored. Jesus doesn't make a cancerous kidney disappear and say, "You can live with just one, you know." Anyone who arrives with two kidneys leaves with two that work perfectly. Jesus doesn't just have power to make evil go away. He's the Lord of life in human flesh: He has the power to restore, even to recreate.

And again, it's not even close. He doesn't break a sweat. A movie director might watch and say, "If we're going to make this into a feature film, we're really going to have to spice things up!" Jesus could do this all day, every day, and never confront some evil that He couldn't defeat with a word.

The folks around Capernaum would be okay with that. They'd be fine with a messiah who stuck around town and just kept healing people of various diseases and demonic oppressions – and doing so free of charge, for that matter. But the following day, Jesus is nowhere to be found: He's gone to a desolate place, no doubt to pray to His Father. When people finally find Him and want Him to return for more, He says, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

That's a profound statement. Jesus says that He isn't sent to open a clinic in Capernaum and spend each day conducting a healing marathon. He has the power to do that, but He's been sent to preach. Why? Because all these miracles are just small demonstrations of what Jesus is about. He's about restoring all of creation, redeeming mankind, doing away with all the curse and corruption that sin has wrought. He can't stay in Capernaum for two reasons. First, He has come to preach in other towns, as He says. Second, He has an appointment to get to just outside the big city, where He'll be crucified to defeat sin, death and devil once and for all. These "little" healings along the way are just hints of the big victory that is won on Good Friday and starts to become apparent on Easter Sunday. And how will the Savior deliver this victory and share it with His people? The same way He's doing it in Luke 4 to heal: He speaks.

He speaks with authority. When He says to a demon, "Be gone," the demon flees.

When He says, "I forgive you," your sins flee too.

Here is joy: although the crucified and risen Jesus is ascended into heaven for you, He still makes sure that His Word is preached in other towns – towns like Boise and Meridian, Eagle and Mountain Home. He sent His apostles out to all nations; and where they were called to glory before the task was completed, He still has pastors preaching on His authority. He still has all of His people speaking His Word. And where His Word is spoken, it's still as powerful as it ever has been.

So when a pastor said this morning, "Tucker Jay, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," that was on Jesus' authority. The Lord Himself chased the devil away, shared His death and resurrection with Tucker and made him a new creation.

Likewise in the absolution, the pastor is just the mouthpiece. "I forgive you all of your sins" is Jesus speaking. You're not forgiven in the name of Timothy (yecch!), but on the authority of the triune God.

Likewise, the Words of Institution at the Supper: they are not just words about Jesus, but Jesus' words by which He promises to be present at the altar – body, blood and all.

Does it sound dramatic? Actually, I think so: almighty God breaks into the cosmos to save! Your mileage will vary, but faith doesn't want drama. It wants Jesus, and Jesus is present in His Word to save.

When commenting on medieval exorcisms, Martin Luther wrote that demons howl and moan and make a big fuss during elaborate exorcism ceremonies, but they sneak away during Holy Baptism. Why? Because, said Luther, it's baptism that really hurts them, and they don't want to give you the satisfaction of seeing it. If nothing else, it's an interesting thought. My bit of law to preach to you today is this: when it comes to your faith, don't be misled by a love for drama. Instead, cling to the Word. In the course of your life, you'll run through a series of pastors: you'll like some more than others, but that doesn't matter near as much as whether he says what Jesus says. You might be distracted by worship services that focus on emotional fulfillment, not the forgiveness of sins, for such worship is designed to be dramatic: but what you need from worship is grace upon grace. I've run into many "used-to-be" Lutherans who said, "The Word and the sacraments were there, but I just found it so boring." I would not advise using that rationale on Judgment Day, for that is to say to the Lord Most High, "You were there to forgive me, and that wasn't enough."

Instead, marvel and rejoice! The Lord Jesus speaks away demons, disease and death. He speaks with authority and none of these enemies can even put up a fight. Despite that awesome, omnipotent power, He still humbles Himself and goes to the cross for you, dies in your place for your salvation. Risen again, He still presents Himself to you in His holy Word. Here! Now!

He still speaks with authority to you; and every gift and healing and blessing that He hands out in our Gospel lesson, He gives to you – in eternity, if not before. He gives it to you, because He still speaks with authority, with these authoritative words: "I forgive you all of your sins."

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