



## **Luke 4:31-44**

### **“Glimpse Of A World Set Free”**

June 23, 2103  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

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### **“Following Christ from City Center”**

LUKE 4:31-44 "GLIMPSE OF A WORLD SET FREE"

4:14 = Typical Day: 6 Rapid Scenes: *Word + Deed*

Audiences	<b>1) v.31a ARRIVAL IN CAPERNAUM (Mk. 1:21-22).</b>		Gospels = 6 Exorcisms, 17 Healings, 8 Nature Miracles
31	And he <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">went down to Capernaum</span> , <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">a city of Galilee</span> .		On Sea Of Galilee, 1800 ft. Below Nazareth, 685 ft. BSL
City	And he was <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">teaching them on the sabbaths</span> ;		4:23, 5 Lk. Sabbath Miracles, No Disciples Yet
			<b>Clash Of Powers: New Kingdom Moves In, Old Rule Moves Out!</b>
A Man	<b>2) vv.31b-37 DELIVERANCE IN SYNAGOGUE (Mk. 1:23-27).</b>		<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">1: Synagogue Setting</span>
32	a and they were <u>astonished</u> at his teaching, for <u>his word</u> ( <i>logos</i> ) was with <u>authority</u> .		Not In Mt., Jesus Required No Confession Of Sin a. Astonished/ Authority b. Man with demon
33	b And in <u>the</u> synagogue there was a man <u>who had</u> the spirit of an unclean <u>demon</u> ;		23x In Luke 4 Exorcisms In Lk.
34	c1 and he cried out <u>with a loud voice</u> <u>"Ah! (Or, "Let us be!")"</u>		Veil Opens, War Begins! Holy One → Fear Resist 1 Added by Lk.
	2 What have you come to do with <i>us</i> Jesus of Nazareth?	Q1	c. Demons Speak
	2' Have you come to destroy <i>us</i> ?	Q2	Answer: Yes!
	1' <b>I know who you are</b> , the Holy One of God!"	Resist 2	1:35, Ps. 106:16 <i>rebuked</i> (vv.35, 39, 41), 11:20
35	c' But Jesus <b>rebuked</b> him, saying, "Be silent (muzzled), and come out of him!"		Technical Term //vv.39, 41 c' Jesus Speaks: No Rituals/Incantations, Authority: 2 Commands
	b' And <u>when</u> the <u>demon had thrown him down in the midst</u> , he came out of him, <u>having done him no harm</u> .		Vicious/Hurtful b' Man without demon <b>Jesus Frees People!</b>
36	a' And they were all <u>amazed</u> and <u>said to one another</u> , "What is this <u>word</u> ( <i>logos</i> )? <u>For</u> with <u>authority</u> he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."		<b>Stronger One, 3:16</b> a' Amazed/ Authority
37	And <u>reports of him</u> (lit. "the echo") went out into <u>every place</u> in the surrounding region.		7:17, Kingdom Echo <b>Jesus Unveils Cosmic Warfare</b>
A Woman	<b>3) vv.38-39 HEALING AT PETER'S HOME: PRAYER (Mk. 1:29-31).</b>		<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I Cor. 9:5</span>
38	a And he <u>arose and</u> left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother in law was <u>ill</u> with a <u>high</u> fever,		5:4, <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">2: Domestic Setting</span> Sick with fever:
	b and they <u>besought</u> him <u>for</u> her.		They speak to Jesus
39	b And he <u>stood over her and rebuked</u> the fever,		He speaks to fever!
	a and it left (released) her; and <u>immediately she rose and</u> served them.	Fever gone: serves	//8:1-3 <b>Jesus Is Approachable, Summary Acts 10:38-42</b>
40	<b>3') v.40 MASS HEALINGS IN PETER'S COURTYARD (Mk. 1:32-34).</b>		<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">All/Any/Various/Every One</span> <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">3: Public Setting</span>
Crowd Healed	<u>Now when</u> the sun was setting (i.e. end of the Sabbath), <u>all</u> those who had <u>any</u> that were sick with <u>various</u> diseases brought them to him; <u>And he laid his hands on every one of them</u> and healed <u>them</u> .		Day Ends, Law-Abiding Jews Took Time, Comprehensive Illness/Demonization Distinguished
	<b>2') v.41 MASS DELIVERANCES IN PETER'S COURTYARD, CORRECT CONFESSION!</b>		
41	a And demons <u>also came out of many</u> , crying, "You are the son of God!"	4:3, 9, 8:38; Speech //v.34, They Know!	
Crowd Freed	b <u>But he rebuked</u> them, b' and would not allow them to speak,	No Confession Of Sin Required, 9:1, 10:19 Silence //v.35, 2 Titles (v.41)// 2 Titles (v.34)	
	a' because <u>they knew that he was the Messiah</u> .	1 Jn. 3:8, Demonic Knowing //v.34d What The War Looks Like At Ground Level	
	<b>1') vv.42-44 PRAYER AND DEPARTURE FOR OTHER CITIES IN JUDEA (Mk. 1:35-39).</b>		
42	And when it was day <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">he departed</span> and went to a lonely (i.e. desert) place.	5:16, 6:12, Fresh Guidance In Prayer //4:16-30, Jesus Cannot Be Controlled	
	And <u>the people</u> sought him and came to him, (43) <u>and would have kept him from leaving</u> , <u>but</u> he said to them, "I <u>must</u> preach <u>the good news of the kingdom of God</u> to <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">other cities</span> <u>also</u> ;	2:49b, 9:1-2, 11:20, 1:38 Kingdom Purpose Statement, //4:18, Sent to proclaim liberty to captives....	
44	for <u>I was sent</u> (i.e. by God) <u>for this purpose</u> ." And he was <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">preaching in the synagogues of Judea</span> .	Larger Jewish Region, <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">4: Mission Setting</span>	

Jesus freed the ill/oppressed in a variety of settings and by various means: teaching, empowered commands, touch. He was harsh with demons, gentle with people. He refused to be limited to one city and had a clear mission from God. Where he showed up, life changed!

### A Brief Treatment Of Luke 4:31-44

What does the kingdom of God look like? For Luke it looks like Jesus taking initiative to preach the reign of his Father and demonstrate the love of it in healings and exorcisms. In him the Father comes near in the power of the Spirit to set life right again. Where he goes the effects of sin and evil are reversed as a preview of God's promised future. Function is restored; life is enhanced.

Luke 4:31-44 is Luke's retelling - with variations and additions- of Mark's portrayal (1:21-39) of a day in the life of Jesus. The organization is a 6:2 concentric pattern (six parts, double center: 1-2-3//3'-2'-1') with a clear bracket in v.31a // vv.42-44. Travel (*and he went down to Capernaum // he departed and went to a lonely place*), location (*a city // other cities*), and synagogue ministry (*teaching them on the sabbath // preaching in the synagogues of Judea*) are terms of inclusion. Jesus deals with male and female (demoniac in synagogue, Peter's mother in law at home), with needy crowds (Peter's courtyard), and those who are yet to see the kingdom (*other cities also*). Verse 40, with its comprehensive terms (*all, any, various, every one of them*), means none who came to him left unblest. Luke highlights the attention Jesus offers: *And he laid his hands on every one of them*. Jesus kingdom mission is clear; and he will not be owned by any village. Disease and devils are easier dealt with than self-centeredness! He says *Yes* to teaching, physical and spiritual healing, but *No* to any scheme to lock him down to one location.

Having escaped the dangers of Nazareth (4:16-30), Jesus goes down to Capernaum, and on the sabbath we find him in the synagogue. His teaching is not summarized till v.43, "I must preach *the good news of the kingdom of God...*" What most distinguished Jesus from other experts was direct authority. They quoted precedent; in him the texts of Scripture are immediate and forceful. In Jesus the Son of God was in the house of God reading the book of God under the illumination of the Spirit of God for the sake of the people of God. It was a Trinitarian moment of divine revelation, and under the pressure of holiness a demon that rode a man to worship screams out in pain and tries to resist. They have no common ground and know he's come to do them in! The four terms they employ (*Jesus of Nazareth, Holy One of God [v.34] // son of God, Messiah [v.41]*) demonstrate the knowledge of the invisible world but are not confessions of faith. Demons know who Jesus is, but salvation is not for them. He commands the spirit to shut up and go, which it does after an attempt at vengeance. Jesus is more than a preacher; in him the deeds and power of God are available, and all are amazed. The first demon Jesus met was in church!

The second act of loving power is in a domestic setting, Peter's home. The classic form of a miracle story is evidenced: problem (fever), entreaty (besought), healing (rebuked fever), evidence of cure (rose and served). Note that the word *rebuked*, a technical term in deliverance stories, is used in the synagogue, in the home, and with the crowds (vv. 35, 39, 41). Jesus speaks to invisible demons and to what we think of as symptoms of disease; both obey him! The family speaks to Jesus; he speaks to the fever! Prayers of entreaty and command are both possible, and when to use each requires discernment.

Luke distinguishes between disease and demons in vv.40-41. They are related effects of the fall (i.e. a broken world, hostile angels), but distinct. Not all who are ill are demonized, and not all who are demonized are physically ill, though there is often overlap. Word gets out, and with the appearance of the first star the sabbath ends and people are free to move about. Peter's courtyard becomes an ER waiting room. Dr. Jesus ministers to each and all with no sense of hurry. The first stanza of Henry Twell's hymn says it all, "At even ere the sun was set, The sick, O Lord, around thee lay; O in what diverse pains they met! O with what joy they went away." Prayer and solitude keep Jesus on track with his mission.

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## GLIMPSE OF A WORLD SET FREE

“And he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.”

None went away from Jesus disappointed.

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What comes to mind when I invoke the name *John F. Kennedy*? A grave and flame at Arlington? A grieving first lady with two small children, one immortalized in a short-pants salute? Perhaps the youthful idealism of the Peace Corps or lines from a famous speech, “Ask not what our country can do for you, but rather what you can do for your country.” I hear the refrain of a Jimmy Dean song, “The PT 109 was gone, but Kennedy and his crew lived on.” When a notable name is called it evokes images that cling to the name. But to understand the man and his times you would have to dig into one of the standard biographies.

How about *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*? If old enough, can you recall the anger and confusion of your own struggle with racism? I can. What images come to mind? The march to Selma? The grand oratory of the *I Have A Dream* speech? Death on a balcony in Memphis? Names of the famous evoke images that may bear little resemblance to the real person in their depth and complexity. They are *pop* images drawn from photographs, sound-bites and two minute documentaries.

How about a third, *Jesus of Nazareth*? What comes to mind? A gentle man with robe and long flowing hair gliding six inches above real life? Maybe you recall a stained glass window of the Good Shepherd. Perhaps his evokes the agony of a lacerated back and crown of thorns? I bet none of you thought of Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Son of God who spent much of his public ministry dealing with the demonized and liberating them from the intrusions of evil.<sup>1</sup> Like the others, we have

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<sup>1</sup> On the world view and cross cultural issues, see Paul Eddy & Gregory Boyd, *The Jesus Legend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), Chapter 1, “Miracles and Method,” 39ff. On Jesus’ warfare world view, see Gregory Boyd, *God At War: The Bible And Spiritual Conflict* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1997), Chapter 7, “War Of The Worlds: The

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**Luke 4:31-44** ..... 5

pop images of Jesus that have little of the depth of the portraits offered in the church’s four biographies. New Testament scholar J. Ramsay Michaels has written, “Nothing is more certain about the ministry of Jesus than the fact that he performed exorcisms.”<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Leech agrees and comments:

“The coming of the kingdom and the achievement of spiritual freedom is seen in terms of the setting free of individuals and of creation from slavery to these powers. This is not a peripheral belief in the New Testament but rather [a] central article of faith. Jesus’ exorcisms stood at the heart of his work.”<sup>3</sup>

Nothing about Jesus is more offensive to modern sensibilities than this historical fact. He believed we are all bent by rebellion and blinded by sin but that some have been colonized by fallen angels and need to be freed, like slaves from a prison camp. Everyone is sin-sick, thus the remedy of the cross, but some have had their integrity breached, thus the remedy of deliverance.

I remember coming home as a Boy Scout from a week at Camp Coker. All of us were dirty, but some had lice, and that is a fitting analogy for the distinction between pervasive sin and the particular problem of spiritual infestation. One is fixed with soap and water; the other requires a medical version of Orkin. So in answer to the question, “Have you come to destroy us?” his answer is, “Yes, I have; you have been squatters on my Father’s property for way too long.”

Unlike his pagan and Jewish contemporaries, Jesus- the chief warrior of God’s kingdom- invoked no long lists of deities. He recited no spells, incantations, and used no paraphernalia in his work of hand-to-hand spiritual combat. The authority

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Warfare Theme of Jesus Exorcisms and Miracles,” 192-214.

<sup>2</sup> “Jesus and the Unclean Spirits,” in *Demon Possession*, edited by John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1976), 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Soul Friend* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1977), 132. This opinion is confirmed by Craig A. Evans, “Inaugurating the Kingdom of God and Defeating the Kingdom of Satan,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.1 (2005), 49-75; N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), “Battling the Satan,” 120-127; Clinton Arnold, “The Kingdom, Miracles, Satan, And Demons,” in Christopher Morgan, Robert Peterson, *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2012), 153-178.

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**Luke 4:31-44** ..... 6

of his word was enough to expel the darkness.<sup>4</sup> Jesus never met a demon he liked; he threw them out, except perhaps the ones people wanted to keep, say Judas for example, or Herod, or Caiaphas! What Orkin does for roaches and vermin, Jesus did for people; he rids them of spiritual defilement, of their annoyance and torment, of their deceit and fear, of their lies and obsessions. Jesus restores function and heals our relationship with God with a love that has power. And he did it everywhere he went: in synagogues, in homes, in public, in Gentile territories. Jesus preached the rule of a God who was near at hand, then demonstrated the same in healings and deliverance. It was *lecture* and *lab*. Jesus taught, then gave demonstrations of how God came to rule in the life of one afflicted with disease or demonization.<sup>5</sup> To help people he did not require a religious resume or a prior confession of sin. It was enough that they needed help. Other stuff could be dealt with later on.

The Holy Spirit is the communication link and power source between God the Father and God the Son in his grand mission of human liberation. Jesus was no independent agent; he *said* only those things he heard the Father say; he *did* only those things he saw the Father doing.<sup>6</sup> His authority were rooted in his radical dependence and consistent obedience to the Father’s promptings and the Spirit’s empowerment. Jesus believed people were physically and spiritually porous, that the fact of universal sin and opportunistic evil rendered people vulnerable to intrusions. Just as something outside can get past the body’s natural defenses and immune systems and cause illness, so with mind and spirit. When you invite Jesus into your life, this is who you are inviting, one who will utterly expose all that is dark and not

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<sup>4</sup> On how Jesus’ ministry differed from his Jewish and pagan counterparts, see Graham H. Twelftree, “EI DE... EGO EKBALLO TA DAIMONIA...” in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 6, edited by David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1986), 361-40; also his *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007). See also Sharon Beekmann, Peter Bolt, *Silencing Satan: Handbook of Biblical Demonology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), Chapter 28, “Jesus and the Demoniacs,” 156-160.

<sup>5</sup> On the kingdom as word and deed, see four pastor/theologians of the Vineyard Movement: Derek Morphew, *Breakthrough* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 1991); Don Williams, *Start Here: Kingdom Essentials for Christians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006); Gary Best, *Naturally Supernatural* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2005), Alexander Venter, *Doing Healing* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> John 5:19-30 captures this deep cooperation well.

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**Luke 4:31-44** ..... 7

of God! We are the battleground, and Jesus is our liberator. People need to be loved and freed before much change in the right direction is possible.

The kingdom of God is not just a vague intellectual concept for a perfect world; it's a divine invasion to recapture life at ground level and give us a glimpse of a new creation already on the way.<sup>7</sup> It's more D-Day than play day. In Jesus, the rule of God is brought to bear on real people with stunning results.

Here in our text a normal synagogue service is suddenly interrupted by a pitched spiritual battle. It wasn't in the bulletin that sabbath: call to worship, opening prayer, Scripture reading, teaching by Jesus, *screaming man and spiritual battle*. No one planned for it. Before lunch Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. That evening Peter's courtyard was packed with the diseased and the demented, human wreckage everywhere. It looked like a big city emergency room on Saturday night. Who knows how long it took to minister to each one with touch and a word, but Jesus did, as Luke is careful to note in verse 40, "And he laid his hands on *every one of them....*" Individual attention, and as long as it took till the problem was gone. They went home singing that great Gaither song, "He touched me. Oh, he touched me. And oh the joy that floods my soul. Something happened, and now I know, he touched me and made me whole."<sup>8</sup> We need that touch today!

The next morning Jesus rises early and goes to an isolated place to hear from his Father before another day's assault on the kingdom of darkness. Real revival is at least as messy and unpredictable as guerilla combat and requires fresh orders every morning. This is why we moderns so easily distort Jesus and turn him into *sweet Jesus, the friend of children and comforter of the elderly*, or into *Jesus the philosopher*, or *Jesus the counselor* or *Jesus the bumper sticker* or *Jesus the politician* because the real Jesus is so scary and non-observant of our conventional wisdom. The United Methodist Church is dying from a weak, wimpy, politically correct Jesus who can't do much for people but give great advice! Nothing is better for a church than a full-on, straightforward exposure to one of the four official biographies of Jesus, and I have chosen to work unit by unit through Luke so that our partial and distorted images can be corrected by the primary sources. We never bypass Jesus; our goal is a deeper and deeper appropriation of his life and his way of doing business.

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<sup>7</sup> On the work of evil in larger cultural issues and in more hidden forms, see Peter Bolt, *Living With The Underworld* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *U.M. Hymnal*, No. 367.

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Main Street Church needs church growth: more people following Jesus Christ. We need lean structures and good administration. We need to tithe instead of tip. We need new confidence in the power of the gospel and more people sharing it. We have a new mission and vision statement, now what do we do with it? We need for dysfunctional and dead marriages to be healed. We need to reclaim our inactive and discouraged church members through listening care and maybe a good kick in the pants. We need to get over *Old Greenwood* and ask about *New Greenwood* and its challenges. But all this- good as it is- is not the same as a visitation of God's presence, and if and when it comes it will look something like the day Luke presents us in the second half of chapter 4. Jesus means freedom for God's beloved people!

At the end of that remarkable sabbath, Capernaum was *a kingdom zone*. Heaven opened over a lakeside village because Jesus came to town. For at least a few hours it was the most blessed place in the universe. When Jesus departed- as he did the next morning- the forces of disease and evil eventually creep back in like some shadowy army retaking Capernaum house by house, but here, for a shining moment, the powers that make human life less than fully human are pushed back and pushed out. I ask you, What would that look like here in Greenwood? We need it, don't we? And only God can provide it, no preacher, no program, no technique. It takes a visitation from on high, a visitation of divine presence, and the only way I know to prepare is prayer and fasting and repentance and crying out to heaven.

What I seek to do with Scripture, which is to observe closely, Annie Dillard does with nature. In her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* she records the following:

“A couple summers ago I was walking along the edge of an island to see what I could see, and mainly to scare frogs. At the end of the island I noticed a small, green frog... half in and half out of the water. He didn't jump; I crept closer. At last I knelt on the island's winter killed grass, lost, dumbstruck, staring at the frog in the creek just four feet away.... And just as I looked... he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent.

He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflated football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulder ruck, rumple and fall. Soon, part of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon, lay in floating folds like bright scum on top of the water.... An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink.

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I had read about the water bug, but never seen one. ‘Giant water bug’ is really the name of... an enormous, heavy-bodied beetle. It eats insect, tadpoles, fish and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with those legs, hugs it tight and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during the vicious bit.... Through the puncture shoots the poison that dissolves the victim’s muscles and bones and organs- all but the skin- and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim’s body, reduced to a juice.”<sup>9</sup>

I love that story. Dillard’s water bug and frog is how it is with evil. Hidden, except to the eye of discernment, Satan and his underlings may puncture our natural defenses with an injection of sinful toxins which dissolve character and fortitude and spiritual resistance till the person has all the internal structure of pudding, and all that remains of a vibrant person is a shell, a husk, a spiritless bag fit for disposal on the trash heap of the universe. What AIDs does to immune system, sin and evil do to the soul and its capacity to resist intrusion. The devil is a leech, unable to create life and instead sucking it out of people for the perverse delight of spoiling God’s good creation. And Jesus came to *do him in*. The answer to the question, “Have you come to destroy us?” is “Yes! Now shut up and get out.” I believe in medicine; I believe in psychiatry, psychology, therapy and counseling. I make such referrals all the time. I believe in anti-depressants and anxiety medications, and I believe Jesus has resources that go beyond all that the rightful use of science can offer. We must use all the healing resources God offers.<sup>10</sup>

One evening in 2009 I was flying home after giving a lecture on Methodist doctrine at Asbury Seminary and found myself sitting beside a professor of neuropsychiatry at the East Tennessee Medical School. Since so many of my members were on anti-depressants, I had lots of questions about depression treatment. Just that day he’d given a lecture to other psychiatrists on the genetic effects of Cylexa on neuro-transmitters. Our discussion eventually moved past the pharmacological revolution in psychiatry to the issue of evil and the books of Dr. M. Scott Peck. What he said next caught my attention because his booming voice was reduced to a whisper, “I am an orthodox Episcopalian who happens to believe in the Nicene Creed, and in thirty years of practice there are three cases I’ve referred to priests for exorcisms.” We are porous people, and the simple fact is that some folk

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<sup>9</sup> “To Illustrate,” *Leadership*, Fall 1992, 46.

<sup>10</sup> For a start, see the U.M. statement on healing in our *Book of Worship*, 613-614.

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need to be spiritually fumigated before much else- like therapy for instance- is going to find traction. When spiritual darkness takes up residence, it needs to be evicted by the loving pressure of the Father's kingdom. Third world Christians know this well.

### TURNING TO THE TEXT

#### Disruption In The Synagogue (vv.31-37)

If I had my way, all it would take to transform people would be more and better information. Teach them what they need to know, give them the right book, and they will do it. Right? Wrong! I love knowledge; I love to teach. It may be a gift of the Spirit, and it is important for the health of the church, but alone it's not enough. Jesus also taught. It was the characteristic way he started in most villages. Go to the synagogue, read from the scrolls, teach the kingdom, see what happens next.

But when Jesus taught, it was different. Luke says twice his instruction was *with authority*.<sup>11</sup> I'm much like the scribes of Jesus' day. I read commentators, quote experts, and use footnotes; Jesus needed none of that. He *was* the authority; his teaching was self-authenticating. He spoke out of the depth of God's heart and in the power of God's Spirit. What he brought was as important as what was on the scroll.

So we see the Jews of Capernaum keeping the habit of synagogue worship, when all of a sudden the divine lights come on in the service: verse 32, "and they were *astonished* at his teaching, for his word was *with authority*." Before there was a *power encounter* with one of Satan's henchmen, there was a *truth encounter* with God's Word. Jesus knew that when the Word of God and the Spirit of God and the Son of God let the light shine, the enemy would be exposed and dealt with. Proclaim the kingdom, then deal with whatever gets stirred up. That was Jesus' method.

You come home at night and flick on the lights. It's then you see them. Those disgusting roaches, or a mouse scurry away into some crack. Had you walked in without turning on the lights, you'd never have seen them. You'd be happily oblivious to your companions. Same way with the man in the synagogue. Whatever was *in him* was undisturbed by the level of spiritual illumination of regular synagogue worship. A man with an unclean spirit came to worship that Sabbath. It happens in our churches all the time, but our level of illumination is so low the spirits are not

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<sup>11</sup> The word *authority* (4:32 // 4:36b) is a verbal bracket for the synagogue scene.

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disturbed. He was a Jewish man at worship, but an area of his life, a piece of his pie, was occupied territory. He could mix and mingle unnoticed, but when the full illumination of the kingdom turned on with Jesus' presence and word, something inside him felt the pressure, "And he cried with a loud voice..." If God were to turn up the spiritual illumination here from about level 1 or level 2 to level 5 or 6, who knows what might pop up or pop out among the Methodists?<sup>12</sup>

If we think of demonization on a scale from mild to severe, this was a moderate to severe case.<sup>13</sup> The victim's personality subsides as another personality rises and speaks through him in fear and hatred. There is a clashing of the kingdoms; the cold front of evil collides with the warm front of God's love, and there is the spiritual equivalent of thunder and lightning. Right there in church! One minute a Bible lesson, the next a pitched battle in the aisle. These entities do not like being exposed by the light and do not want to leave their host through whom they have influence. There is no common ground between them and Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Two forces are waging a battle for the life of a man who's already in church! Just getting people in the building doesn't solve the problem. Apparently lots of these things sit through dead church services! Spiritual illumination and power must be brought to bear.

It was a standard part of Jewish theology that the Evil One and his fallen angelic cohorts would be destroyed at the end of the age.<sup>15</sup> They know this and are surprised to be dealt with *ahead of schedule*. The question "Have you come to destroy us?" means, "Have you come to destroy us *now*?" Jesus in effect says, "Not destroy you yet, only evict you from this child of God. Now be muzzled, quit barking, and come out him!" God is going to deal with sin and rid the world of evil, and Jesus is the preview of coming attractions. A bit now, the whole thing later.

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<sup>12</sup> On John Wesley's experience, see Daniel Jennings, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* (Sean Media, 2005), Chapter 2, "John Wesley's Experience With Spiritual Warfare," 8-37, for sixteen examples from Wesley's journals.

<sup>13</sup> The most severe case is Mk. 5:1-20// Lk. 8:26-39// Mt. 8:28-34.

<sup>14</sup> The Greek phrase *ti hemen kai soi*, here translated "What have you do with us?" is an idiom for "What between us?" or "We have nothing to do with one another."

<sup>15</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 147. See *Testament of Moses* (300BCE). 10:1, "And then his kingdom will appear in the whole creation, and then the devil will have an end, and sorrow will be led away with him." Jesus was operating within this set of expectations.

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**Luke 4:31-44 ..... 12**

Now because these entities are vicious and spiteful, and because they delight to bring misery wherever possible, they throw the man down before vacating the premises. But the Jesus who has power to deliver him also has power to protect, and so Luke the physician notes no harm was done. The people who had only a few moments ago been *astonished* at Jesus' teaching are now *amazed* at his deed of power and mercy. He has authority in the realm of the unseen spirits they have not witnessed before. Such events are hard to keep quiet: verse 39, "And reports of him went into every place in the surrounding region." I admit that preachers and church may be boring; Jesus Christ never is, and it is him that we seek.

The first demon Jesus ever dusted was in a good Jew in the middle of a synagogue service. I love well-planned services, and I don't particularly like surprises. I don't even like it when I find misspelled words or when the margins are not lined up. You see, I know you give me and the choir a grade each week! But when Jesus shows up, he brings a different kind of order. Not checking off another sermon or anthem but men and women set free and made whole! Methodism has largely placed its focus on institutional maintenance, structures, programs and clergy benefits because we have lost touch with the power to touch and transform lives. We are spiritually infertile and evangelistically nearly impotent. We need a fresh visitation from on high; I do not want to retire or die before I see a revival.

**A Family Matter (vv. 38-39)**

Did you know Dr. Jesus makes house calls? There was a woman who could not be in synagogue that sabbath. She was a widow with no sons of her own, else she would be living with them as custom dictated. Her daughter married a Capernaum fisherman, Cephas, and thanks to decades of works by some excellent Catholic archaeologists, you can visit the ruins of their home today. It was venerated early in the second century as a place of pilgrimage and later churches were built over the sight. During the excavation some fish hooks were found between two layers of stone floor.<sup>16</sup> Imagine holding one of those in your hand! St. Peter's fishing lure!

The service was over, benediction pronounced, and the guest preacher went home for lunch with Simon. Feeding preachers fried chicken for Sunday lunch is an ancient custom not to be lightly dismissed! Among Methodists it's known as *the*

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<sup>16</sup> James Charlesworth, "Excavating 'Peter's House,'" *Religious Book Journal*, Spring 1989, 21-22.

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**Luke 4:31-44 ..... 13**

*gospel bird!* Luke’s retelling of this homey family story differs slightly from Mark’s.<sup>17</sup> Luke heightens the temperature to a *high* fever. They do not merely inform Jesus about her; they *besought him for her*, thus making it into a prayer of intercession. What a strange fellow, this Jesus. He stood over her and *rebuked the fever*. He spoke to it, a word of command coming down with authority, not a prayer of petition going up in hope. The church is not the Lord. We do not often hear with his clarity; we pray for healing and use the means of grace, but on occasion the Spirit may prompt someone to offer a prayer of command and speak directly to a condition. And if it’s God- and not just foolish presumption- something will happen on the other end of the transaction. I have seen it with my own eyes on occasion.

Did you know that there’s a distinction between healing and wholeness? I have seen people touched by God in some remarkable way and it make almost no change in their character. For them the penetration of grace was only skin deep. They were self-centered before they were healed, and they were self-centered afterwards. But to be touched by God ought to make me want to touch others in service, and that is the response of Peter’s mother-in-law. Five minutes after the fever left, five minutes after the laughter and tears stopped, you could hear the chicken frying! Verse 39: “And it (whatever *it* was) left her, and immediately she rose *and served them.*”

Jesus cares about the church. He started with the congregation in Capernaum. Jesus cares about the home. Kingdom reality is also for the domestic slice of life. If you want healing but don’t want to serve, you abort the grace of God. I draw from this the conclusion that we have a responsibility to care for those who for good reason, like Peter’s mother-in-law, cannot come to worship, not *don’t* but *can’t*. We take communion to them when we serve it here at church and pray for their healing. Can you give up an hour or so on Sunday afternoon to help someone feel a part of the body of Christ? Jesus has the right to disrupt our worship services, and he has the right to disrupt our Sunday afternoons. He made house calls; I make house calls; you can make house calls. Our pleasures and diversions are petty when compared to the work we have to do, and there are not enough workers at Main Street. Too many in the stands; not enough on the field.

**Creating A Kingdom Zone (vv. 40-41)**

Not all of my favorites made it out of the 1964 into the 1989 *Hymnal*. Henry Twells

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<sup>17</sup> 1:29-31.

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**Luke 4:31-44** ..... 14

“At Even, ere the Sun Was Set” is a poetic meditation on the evening scene in Peter’s courtyard. Stanza No. 1 contrasts the beginning and end of the scene:

“At even ere the sun was set, The sick, O Lord, around thee lay;  
O in what divers pains they met! O with what joy they went away!

Stanza No. 2 could only have been written by someone who loved the church:

“O Savior Christ, our woes dispel; For some are sick and some are sad,  
And some have never loved thee well, And some have lost the love they had.”

But it is in the final stanza that the church sings its heartfelt prayer:

“Thy touch has still its ancient power; No word from thee can fruitless fall;  
Hear, in this solemn evening hour, And in thy mercy heal us all.”<sup>18</sup>

Our movement thus far has been from a synagogue setting to a family setting, and now thirdly to a public setting. Perhaps people came to Peter’s compound who never came to synagogue. They were the dropouts, drifters and spiritual seekers who did not feel welcome or comfortable in the synagogue. Notice also that the sabbath is respected by the village as a whole. Not until the first evening star is visible is the sabbath over and the people free to travel to Peter’s home. If you are looking for a biblical justification for public services of healing, here it is. It is a great help to United Methodists to know that our denomination officially approves of such services and has provided eighteen pages of healing services for pastors to use in our *Book of Worship*.<sup>19</sup> We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and if he chooses to show up and do something that’s not in the bulletin or in the budget or in *The Book of Discipline*, who am I to say No? When I stand before the Lord I don’t want to be asked, “Why did you get in my way? Why did you stand between me and my people? What were you trying to protect them from? Me?”

Two things about verses 40 and 41 need to be noted before we move ahead. First, no one went home disappointed that evening. Healing in the church is very much a *hit and miss* affair, and those bold souls who have practiced it for years have

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<sup>18</sup> *The Methodist Hymnal*, 1964, No. 501.

<sup>19</sup> 613-629.

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more stories of failure than success.<sup>20</sup> Much mystery remains. We live amidst ambiguity, paradox, confusion, and often utter ignorance. We are granted signs of the kingdom, but the kingdom in its fullness remains future. But to see something happen even once in response to prayer is to be hooked at a level way beyond curiosity. As my members in Fairfield County used to say, “Even a blind hog will find an acorn from time to time.” That’s me- *from time to time*, but Dr. Jesus batted a thousand, “...*all* those who had *any* that were sick with *various* diseases brought them to him. And he laid his hands on *every one of them* and healed them.” Such is his compassion. Sometimes in my mind’s eye- even while preaching- I picture Jesus walking up and down the aisles of this church laying his hands on people. Under his touch they melt. One of the reasons our medical system is so overwhelmed is that Christians are not living healthy lives and praying for the sick.

A second item is that Luke clearly distinguishes between illness and demonization.<sup>21</sup> To say Jesus and the early believers were ignorant and taught that all illness was demonic is simply false. Organic diseases and malformations he healed, demons he cast out, and he knew the difference between them. We are complex creatures, and no one treatment cures all diagnoses. He who is good with a hammer thinks every problem is a nail. Not so with Jesus. It is never once-size-fits-all with him. And when Jesus was finished, all went home to the sleep of the blessed. Jesus curled up on a mat in the corner of Peter’s home and prayed, “Father, it’s been a good day. I’m looking forward to tomorrow. Wake me up early so we can spend some time together. May the holy angels protect me this night. Oh, and about this man Peter. He might make a good disciple. He opened his home to the whole town; perhaps he can open his heart to the world.”

**No To Capernaum’s Demands (vv.42-44)**

There is tiredness that comes from physical labor, and from it the body is renewed through rest and good food. But there is another type of exhaustion that comes from

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<sup>20</sup> For a history of the rise and fall of healing ministry in the church, see Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005). For a book of testimonies and apologetics, Cecil Murphey, *I Believe in Healing* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> For a sophisticated analysis, see *A Time To Heal: A Report for the House of Bishops on the Healing Ministry* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), Chapter 9, “Deliverance from Evil,” 167-181.

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the spiritual and emotional labor of ministering to the needs of others. Sleep and food help, but the depletion of the soul's energies is replenished by three additional remedies: 1) retreat into solitude, 2) prayer as communion, and 3) a burning sense of call that helps set boundaries with demanding- and often selfish- people.

See Jesus wake up before all the household. See him slip out the door and down the starlit street for his day's first appointment. But as soon as Capernaum rouses they're on his path, begging him to stay and never leave. They've tasted the kingdom and want more. What is it about blessing that leads to blindness? Capernaum is a kingdom zone, but Capernaum is still made of sinners like us. "There's plenty of work to do right here in Greenwood, Pastor Phil, why are you always talking about foreign missions?" Hello. Whose logic is that?

On one level Nazareth and Capernaum were different. Nazareth was spiritually closed, Capernaum spiritually open. Nazareth tried to kill him; Capernaum tried to keep him. So we learn that Satan has more than one way of neutralizing the message. If you can't kill the messenger, lock him up in a small town where people want more and more for themselves and are blinded to the needs around them. On the Sabbath Jesus said a profound Yes to the needs of Capernaum and made it a *kingdom zone*; the next morning he gave them an uncompromising No, "I *must* preach the good news of the kingdom of God in *other cities* also; for I was sent for this purpose." A church without a clear sense of mission is a patsy for any faddish agenda that comes along. Jesus could say No because a bigger Yes was burning in his bones. Blessing is meant to be spread around. We keep only what we are willing to give away. The final test of spiritual renewal is not, "Am I blessed?" The final test is, "Am I in mission because of the blessing of God?"

### CONCLUSION

What images come to mind when I call the name *John F. Kennedy*? *Martin Luther King*? *Jesus Christ*? I hope that after today you can never think of our Lord in quite the same manner. Jesus Christ is bigger and better and bolder and badder and more disruptive and dangerous than we've been taught. His is good, but he is not safe.

Preaching is such a foolish business, and it is so by God's design. I can only point; I cannot deliver the realities. That is something God reserves for himself. Come, Holy Spirit. Get these realities off the page and into our lives. Please help us.

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