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Sermon: February 3, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HERE AND NOW”

Luke 4:31-37

- Please turn with me to Luke chapter 4.

**“The Spirit of the LORD is on me
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s
favor.”**

- **“Good news...freedom...recovery of sight... release...”** and **“the Lord’s favor”**: Our Messiah’s sermon in verses 4:18-19 is a message of faith for the faithless, hope for the hopeless, love for the loveless.

- Yet in Nazareth the Good News of the Kingdom collides head-on with intentional disbelief. The Nazarenes will not accept that Jesus is God’s Anointed One, and in verses 23-30 they become enraged when he reveals that his Gospel is for Gentiles as well as Jews. They attempt to lynch him, but he walks away.

- And so (verses 31-32) Jesus goes **“down to Capernaum... and on the Sabbath [begins] to teach.”** Doubtless it is a proclamation of **“Good news... freedom ...recovery of sight ... release...”** and **“the Lord’s**

favor.” “The people... [are] amazed at his teaching, because his message [has] authority.”

- Here, too, there is resistance, but of a different kind. There is **“in the synagogue”** (verses 33-34) **“a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He [cries] out at the top of his voice, ‘Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!’”**

In contrast to the Nazarenes, this demonized man acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God. He explicitly testifies, **“You are – the Holy One of God!”**

However, it is not a witness of trust, but of fear. **“Have you come to destroy us?”** he shrieks.

There is no reverence here, only hostility. Like most evil spirits that Jesus confronts, this one identifies him, calling him **“Jesus of Nazareth... the Holy One of God.”** It is likely an effort to get control, in keeping with the occult belief that the precise use of a person’s name gives the speaker mastery over him.

Notice that demon speaks twice in the plural: **“What do you want with us? ...Have you come to destroy us?”** But it also speaks in the singular: **“I know who you are,”** and in verse 35 Luke reports that a single entity leaves the man.

Evidently there is only one demon involved, but it has penetrated so deeply into the victim’s psyche that he has lost himself. This man thinks as the demon thinks, does what it wants him to do. He feels its terror of judgment and shares its dread of Jesus.

So when he screams, “**What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?**” it is not just the demon talking – it is him, too.

Christ has come “**to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,**” like him.

He has come to “**release the oppressed,**” like him.

The Messiah is his only hope, his only way out, his only rescue; but, compelled by this insidious spirit to collaborate in his own destruction, the man fears and hates the Savior.

Demons are not as quick to expose themselves in North America as in some cultures. Nevertheless they do exist. They cause some mental disorders, violent action, bodily disease, and rebellion against God. While they are not the source of all wickedness, evil spirits are actively striving against God and us.

Even if we never meet a demoniac, this man in verses 33-34 is closer than we might assume. Whom do we know who is losing their self-control and identity to an outside agency? Who does their enemy’s work for them by heedlessly collaborating in their own destruction? Every addict, alcoholic, and compulsive gambler who is not in recovery!

○ And what about us, when we give lust or envy or covetousness or falsehood or bitterness a foothold? At first it is confined to a small corner of our hearts and minds; but it demands more room, and before long it dominates our lives. We like to think our sin is our servant; but the “servant” soon becomes the master, and it leads us down the road of ruin, {Ro 6:23} “**For the wages of sin is death.**”

○ James puts it more colorfully: {Jas 1:14-15, NRSV} “**one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.**”

The more completely we give ourselves to sin, the worse the damage. The crazy thing is that the further we fall, the tighter we tend to cling to our sin, as though it was our lifeline to happiness.

Having said all that this is not a message of defeat, but of victory!

■ In verse 35 the Lord Jesus sternly commands the demon, “**Be quiet! Come out of him!**” And it throws “**the man down before them all and [comes] out without injuring him.**”

Surely this tormented man has not dared to hope for so great a salvation. He has been “a lost cause” for too long. But not anymore! Not now that the Christ has appeared and {Mk 1:15} “**The kingdom of God is near.**”

This man lost himself, but now his God-given identity is back! His mind was shattered, but now he is whole! His soul was bound by seemingly unbreakable chains, but now he is free! He was severely oppressed, but now he has been released!

Consider the implications...

If the Son of God was mighty to free a man without any self-determination, he is mighty to liberate anyone – including us. Amen?!

If the Son of God was mighty to unshackle a man so completely oppressed, he is mighty to release anyone – including us. Amen?!

If the Son of God was mighty to cleanse a man thoroughly defiled, he is mighty to cleanse anyone – including us. Amen?!

If the Son of God was mighty to re-create a man in whom God's image was nearly unrecognizable, he is mighty to renew anyone – including us. Amen?!

■ Verses 36-37: **“All the people [are] amazed and [say] to each other, ‘What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!’ And the news about him [spreads] throughout the surrounding area.”**

“This teaching” is the Good News of the Kingdom of God, which is ancient yet ever new.

○ Nearly two millennia after the Lord Jesus saved that demon-possessed man it is still a Gospel of **“authority and power,”** for {Heb 4:12} **“The word of God is... alive... active”** and performative. It carries out actions and establishes conditions. The LORD YHWH has promised, {Is 55:11}

**“my word that goes out from my mouth...
will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplished what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I
sent it.”**

○ His basic purpose for us is {Jn 10:10} **“that [we] may have life, and have it to the full”** – not a profusion of material wealth and sensual pleasure (as the world defines

life), but the abundant blessings that are found in union with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Jesus asked his disciples: {Jn 6:67-69} **“You do not want to leave”** me, **“do you?”** Peter answered, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”**

Here and now **“the good news”** is echoing in the ears of the poor in spirit and, yes, the poor in resources.

Here and now **“prisoners”** of addiction, compulsive sin, and evil are hearing the proclamation of freedom.

Here and now the spiritual eyes of **“the blind”** are being opened.

Here and now **“the oppressed”** are being released.

Here and now **“the year of the Lord's favor”** is breaking in to this world of sin and death.

No one is so unworthy that the Living God will withhold this from them. No one is so far gone that he or she cannot receive it.

This undeserved mercy and kindness comes wrapped up in Jesus. In order to experience it, we must receive him on his terms: belief in him and his mission, repentance of sin, confession of faith, and biblical discipleship.

Not all are willing. When the Lord announced this Good News in Nazareth, the audience opposed him and his message. They did not accept that God

was offering his gifts equally freely and with identical extravagance to the Gentiles whom they hated.

In the face of such resolute rejection Jesus walked away. He left his hometown and, to the best of our knowledge, he never returned.

Yet, if we are willing – or at least willing to be willing – to receive Jesus the Messiah, his Gospel of the Kingdom will become real in and through us, just as it did in Capernaum. It will be a beautiful and amazing sign that Christ Jesus is powerfully present here, and that we are being saved.

Luke 4:31-37 is the Word of the Lord.