

Sunday Nov. 8, 2020
 Lesson 10: Worship in the Synagogue
 Scripture: Luke 4: 31-44

Context:

Our scripture lesson today begins a new section in our series on encountering God. This week we begin to look at places of worship and how they change those who worship. Each week we will look at a place of worship or a charge to a worshipping congregation. We will then examine how worship leads us to new places as believers of our Lord.

Our first passage focuses on the beginning of Jesus and his public ministry in the Gospel of Luke. The first three chapters of the gospel focus on Jesus's birth, his genealogy, and John the Baptist. In chapter four we move to Jesus beginning his ministry after resisting temptation from the devil in the wilderness.

Jesus goes first to his hometown Nazareth. However, adult Jesus is not the same as boy Jesus. He is rushed out of town after infuriating those who were once his peers.

Yet when Jesus enters Capernaum, things change. When Jesus enters the synagogue, he teaches with authority and people are in awe. He heals a man with a demon, which leads to multiple healings from a sick relative of a disciple to crowds gathering with relatives who possess maladies and/or demons. At daybreak, Jesus goes to a deserted place. The people find him and he reveals it is his time to move on and he goes to other Judean synagogues.

All of the events are tied together with a common thread. Jesus's authoritative teaching stirs the demon in a man who recognized the Word of God and how it could not only destroy him, it could destroy "us," the whole realm of demons.¹ The exorcism sets the tone of establishing Jesus as a teacher of the Word of God, a Word possessing power.² The people are amazed in the worship space of what is taking place.

Following the exorcism, Jesus goes to visit the home of Simon and he "rebukes" a fever. Jesus's words have a power, which cannot be diminished. Whether he is preaching or sitting beside someone's bed, his words transform lives.

The people talk and others begin to come to Jesus for healing. Once again, he uses his words to bring wholeness. It may even be Jesus did not permit the demons to speak because he would not tolerate confessions from evil spirits.³ The crowds are desperate for his presence and power.

Yet Jesus leaves once it is time to go. The crowds try to persuade him otherwise and yet he is steadfast. There are other people to preach to and there are other people to heal. Jesus must continue forward to go where his gifts are needed.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 67.

² Ibid., 67.

³ Ibid., 68.

Application

Did you know the ancient town of Capernaum still exists? An archaeological dig revealed the settlement years ago and now there is a modern church over a site where fish symbols were found; the remnants of an early church. Fresh flowers bloom out of old stones and you can see the Sea of Galilee as a backdrop.

The synagogue ruins from the second to third century still stands there. You can find the names of people in the stones and Jewish symbols all around. While there is no roof, you can still tell this place was once huge.

When I went there several years ago, I had the chance to read this passage aloud as we studied the scene around us. To read the Word in this holy place transforms the passage and makes it come alive in powerful ways. This is the place where Jesus preached and all were amazed. We stood in the place where the words of Jesus began to heal and transform lives.

I still keep the memory of reading this passage there close to my heart as a reminder of how God's Word can transform a congregation. The power of the Word are not isolated to ancient Galilean villages. The Word of our Lord speaks to rural, suburban, and urban congregations today. Jesus still heals, provokes, challenges, and soothes those who gather together to praise God.

The passage from Luke also makes clear how the Word of God is meant to amaze and transform people. It is not about being entertained or simply being affirmed. The Word of God is to lead us to a new place in our discipleship and following Jesus.

In the case of Jesus's ministry of Capernaum, we hear how the Word of God works among people in different ways. Firstly, we hear how the Word of God spoken to a congregation leads to the healing of someone who had a demon within them. Often times, we may say to ourselves: "That sermon didn't speak to me today." Sometimes I wonder if we forget how God might be speaking to someone else who needed to hear a word, whether of encouragement or of provocation.

Secondly, we see how the Word of God leads to the resistance to evil. Those with demons are greatly concerned at Jesus's presence and they cry out to get their way. They know how Jesus's words and presence will threaten their existence. If he continues, they will be threatened and ultimately forced to leave.

Sometimes we may be tempted to believe we need to have sermons that make us feel good about ourselves or talk about nothing but grace and love. While we do need reminders of grace and love, the scripture here makes it clear Jesus's words have something to say to evil. If the words of Jesus only make us feel good and never make us think or challenge us, then can we truly accept the invitation Jesus give us to follow him? Jesus makes it clear following him is not something to be taken lightly or easily. Instead, it may even cost us as we will always have to ask ourselves who we truly worship and follow.

Thirdly, we do see how Jesus's words bring us healing. Often times when I read the scriptures, especially the book of Psalms, I will find comfort there. Sometimes I do not even know I need the healing until I read the words and make them my own prayer. The Word of God gives us healing in ways we could never receive on our own. Phrases like "Blessed are those who mourn," and "Do not be afraid," take us to a place where we are reminded of God's presence even in the darkest of places and times.

The Word of the Lord still comes to us today. As we read of Jesus in the synagogue, we are reminded of how he is in our churches today too. As his Word is proclaimed, we are encouraged to see how he is still moving from place to place, bringing the good news of God's kingdom to every place he can go.

How do you think worship can transform us? Why do you think Word can simultaneously heal, provoke, and challenge us? How do you find ways to engage Word daily? What ways does the Word spur you in your ministry as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

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