JESUS HEALS AND PREACHES

Luke 4:31–44

Key Verse: 4:40

“Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.”

Have you heard of the expression, “Are you for real?” In a sense it can mean, “You seem crazy right now.” More broadly, this question is asking, “Is what you’re saying or doing just an act, or is this genuine?” Costumes are not just for Halloween; people use them all the time, both in personal relationships and in public, pretending to be something they’re not. In public people especially resort to pretense. In today’s passage Jesus begins his public ministry. But what he’s doing isn’t pretense at all; Jesus is definitely “for real.” What is it about Jesus that Luke wants us to know is real? It’s his compassion for people. How does this passage show us his compassion for people? Why is it important for us to know this? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

In last week’s passage Jesus quoted Isaiah’s prophecy to explain what he came to do. He came to bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, and God’s favor to everybody. Now, as he begins to work in Galilee, we see how these things become reality. In this week’s passage Luke records four events in one 24-hour period, and they all describe elements of Jesus’ ministry, both public and private. There’s an obvious emphasis on his teaching and preaching and on the power of his word. But there’s an even deeper emphasis here, on how Jesus feels about people.

Read verses 31,32. This is a general statement about what Jesus is doing. It’s a Sabbath day, and Jesus is in a town called Capernaum. It’s a fisherman’s village right on the Sea of Galilee. He’s teaching. It all seems pretty ordinary. But people’s response tells us something extraordinary is going on. Luke says they are “astonished at his teaching.” Why? Because “his word possessed authority.”

Let’s first think about the word “astonished.” In Greek it’s “ekplesso,” and literally it means to be knocked out of one’s senses; today we would say they were “blown away.” People usually had this kind of reaction when Jesus healed people (e.g. 9:43). But in this case, it’s because of his teaching. Jesus’ teaching, if we would just share it as it is, always has this effect (cf. Ac13:12). For most of us, the word “teaching” has a trigger that immediately says to us, “Boring.” But Jesus’ teaching immediately knocked people out of their senses.

Luke explains it was because it had “authority.” “Authority” is repeated in verse 36. Luke uses this Greek word more than any other Gospel writer (4:32,36; 5:24; 7:8; 9:1; 10:19; 12:5; 19:17; 20:2,8,20; 22:5). The Greek word, “exousia,” means “the capacity to command, control or govern.” Generally we’re not too fond of “authority”; it sounds like somebody who enjoys bossing people around. But Jesus’ authority was in “his word.” It was like Genesis 1, where God just spoke his word, and things came to be. In Jesus’ time, those who taught in the synagogues quoted from different commentaries and from other famous rabbis. But Jesus went straight to the word of God itself. God, the Creator of heavens and earth, has chosen to reveal himself through his word. It’s his word that has authority, because it’s from God. The astonishing authority in Jesus’ word seems to reflect his own unique and intimate relationship with God (10:22).

So what happened? Read verses 33,34. We notice several things here. First, Luke says this man had “the spirit of an unclean demon.” What an expression! Next, it says this spirit made the man cry out “with a loud voice.” Third, the demon immediately knows who Jesus is: “Jesus of Nazareth,” “the Holy One of God.” And finally, the demon thinks Jesus has “come to destroy us.” This is actually true.

What do we learn from this? It tells us that people’s souls can be occupied by demons. We’re not exactly sure how, but they take control and start “driving” people away from others (8:29). They also use people for evil purposes. Here the demon is described as “unclean,” or dirty. Unclean demons cause people to be “troubled,” disturbed or confused (6:18; cf. Ac5:16). It’s still happening today. It’s a part of the devil’s dominion over all of humanity. He’s jealous of human beings, God’s highest creation, and seeks to ruin us in whatever way possible. In this case, the demon is shouting at Jesus, trying to disrupt his teaching.

What does Jesus do? Read verse 35. Three times in this passage Luke says Jesus “rebuked.” Jesus used the astonishing authority of his word not to crush people, but to rebuke demons and drive them out. Luke the astute medical doctor says that when Jesus drove it out, it caused the man “no harm.” Opposite of the devil’s, Jesus’ purpose is to heal and restore damaged human beings.

Luke goes on to emphasize people’s response. Read verses 36,37. Everyone sees that the power and authority of Jesus’ word extends even to the invisible world of demons. No one could drive demons out of people only by the power of a word except Jesus. Reports about him start spreading rapidly.

The second event Luke records is much more quiet. Read verses 38,39. This Simon is the man called Peter; Luke is going to describe his calling in the very next passage (5:1–11). But here, the focus is on his mother-in-law. She seems to be living in the house as a widow. After attending synagogue on the Sabbath, it was customary to go to someone’s home for a meal. But in this house it seems there’s no meal, because this woman is so sick, and she’s the one who usually did the cooking. Luke says she has a “high fever.” It’s no joke. It might take a long time and a great struggle to calm it down. People there who know the situation “appeal” to Jesus on her behalf. For us, it’s like a prayer. To someone with such authority, this woman’s illness might seem unimportant. But not to Jesus. What does he do? Unusually it says he stands over her and “rebukes” the fever. It probably doesn’t mean a demon caused the fever; it’s just to show another area where Jesus’ word has authority —physical sicknesses. Even more than that, it highlights Jesus’ compassion. The devil wants to leave people sick and helpless and unable to do the good things they really want to do. Jesus came to set us free from this. And again, it’s the power of his word that brings healing. It says “immediately” she rises and begins to serve. Later Luke is going to show us how various women, healed by Jesus, also begin to serve (8:1–3).

Luke goes on to mention a third “event.” Read verse 40. “As the sun was setting” tells us that people wait until the Sabbath is over. But they sense that this time of day won’t bother Jesus, so they come—they just can’t wait until the next day. They bring anybody they know who is “sick with various diseases.” These folks might have physical problems, moral problems or spiritual problems, or some combination of them all. We can just imagine the scene of all these diseased people who’ve been suffering, now waiting for a chance with Jesus.

And how does he respond? Obviously he’s been going all day long; sunset is the time to get some rest. And these are not just a few healthy folks coming over for a brief, friendly visit; they’re a mob of troubled people with all kinds of sicknesses, wounds and demands. Most people would close the shutters, bolt the door and pretend to be asleep. But what does Jesus do? It says “…he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.” His heart is open to each one. He’s more than willing to help them. Though the word “compassion” is not here, it’s palpable in what Jesus is doing. Touching people, one by one. So personal.

When people are hurting, what they need is not some profound words; they need a personal touch—maybe just a hug, or holding hands in silence. We can’t do this if we keep a safe distance. Touching people means getting close, taking a risk. It means stopping to spend time and treating people like they really matter. It affirms their value and dignity. We may think we don’t have Jesus’ power and authority to perform dramatic healings. But if we learn his compassion and just start giving people our personal time, we can become like his hands and feet in our hurting world. It has to be done unselfishly, when we’re tired, want personal time, even when demands seem overwhelming. Luke isn’t emphasizng a ministry of big numbers done for personal glory. He’s showing how personal care, done purely out of the affection of Christ, is essential to healing.

In verse 41 we again see demons coming out, kind of as a by-product of Jesus’ personal care. It again emphasizes the power of Jesus’ ministry, challenging the demonic in people’s souls. These demons think they can win some kind of power play with Jesus by calling out his name. For the third time Jesus rebukes them, not allowing them to speak. We might think it would be good to let people know as soon as possible that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ. But as he’s just beginning his ministry, it’s not the time to broadcast this knowledge. If people knew it, they would try to stop Jesus from following God’s will, the way of the cross.

The fourth event is in verses 42–44. It begins, “And when it was day…” Evidently the healings went well into the night, maybe even all night. Though he lacks rest, Jesus departs early and goes to “a desolate place.” Obviously he’s trying to carve out even a bit of time to pray (cf. Mk1:35). But people seek him and come to him even *there*, at *daybreak*. Very intense. As they say, “everybody wants a piece” of Jesus. They’re desperate to keep him from leaving (42b).

And how does he respond? Read verse 43. Through a time of prayer Jesus renewed his sense of purpose from God. He says, “I must.” In Luke’s Gospel Jesus repeats this word “must” often (2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7,44). In his ministry Jesus isn’t just responding to human need; he’s carefully following God’s plan for him. He’s not showing compassion for his own ego, to impress or gain popularity; he’s doing his utmost to obey the will of God. He’s on a mission from God, to show God’s compassion for all the people, everywhere, to bring all kinds of wounded and lost people back to God’s kingdom. He’s not working to build his own little kingdom; he’s working for the much greater kingdom of God.

This tells us something important. Life can be so demanding. We all need to make time to reconnect with God, to renew what our lives should really be all about. As Jesus had a “must” in his heart, so should we. A sense of God’s greater will gives our lives a real sense of purpose and direction. We need to see what we’re doing through the perspective of his kingdom. We need to stay focused on sharing with people the good news of the kingdom through Jesus.

Read verse 40 again. Praise Jesus, who sees all kinds of sick people with great compassion and uses his own hands to heal. May God help us experience his compassion and healing personally, and learn how to show it to others.