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“Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit”

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“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.” (Mark 1:25).

Jesus is in Capernaum. It’s the Sabbath, so of course He’s at the synagogue. He’s been invited to teach. Imagine a sacred space where candles are flickering, lots of people are gathered together. Aside from the voice of Jesus, it’s otherwise quiet in there. Suddenly there’s an uproar of noise and clamor. A man is shouting at Jesus. Sacred space is shattered. It’s all so loud and startling and inappropriate. “What do you want with **us**, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” It’s as if the mouth saying the words is no longer controlled by the man who owns the mouth. “I know who you are” the mouth says, “the Holy One of God!”

There’s nothing about this man that looks odd. He’s not dragging around a heavy barbed tail or anything. But clearly, he’s out of control. It’s frightening. What is he going to do next? “Quiet!” Jesus says to the man. One simple word does the job; the evil spirit must acquiesce; it has no choice. “Come out of him!” Again, the evil spirit cannot say no to that voice. On the way out, the spirit convulses the man violently. Wouldn’t that be like the devil: get in one last lick even while on the way out.

But backing up a bit, did you notice this bizarre character already knew who Jesus was? In the Gospels, the demons know before anyone else. Hell understands.

You remember at his birth; the heavens bore witness to him with the angels. Now *hell* is bearing witness to him with demons. Oddly, wherever Jesus goes his simple presence seems to excite and agitate and expose those who are demon possessed. I don’t know that they had any more possessed people back then than we do today, but the mere presence of Jesus back then so rattled their cages that they seem far more prevalent, shouting and disrupting and shrieking.

So now, the Lutheran question: What does this mean? The miracles always teach us something. What does this miracle teach us?

First it tells us Jesus is stronger than the devil. It seems silly even to mention, but maybe we wouldn’t know that were not for this passage and others like it. And it’s helpful to be reminded of this truth. If Jesus is the one who really wields the power, there’s no point then in looking to other gods, or practicing superstition or consulting horoscopes or carrying around good luck charms or amulets or even praying to the saints. If Jesus is stronger than the devil, then He is stronger than anything or anyone in your life. Do you have an addiction? Jesus is stronger. A progressive disease? Jesus is stronger. Are you in a toxic relationship? Jesus is stronger.

Second, this miracle teaches the Word of Jesus is the Word of God and has power. It does not return to Him empty but succeeds in the thing for which He sends it

(Is. 55:11). The same word that can say to a storm “Quiet!” can also say to a demon “Quiet!” What was said Lazarus, “Come out!” was also said to a demon “Come out!” The Word that makes something what it is, (“This is my blood for you, for your forgiveness”) was also at work in Capernaum. The word of Jesus is the Word of God.

Notice, it’s only words that Jesus uses to expel demons. There’s a notable lack of technique. No incantations. No rituals. No props. No muss, no fuss. Just words.

Third, just as God has plans for us, which are good, God also has plans for the devil and his demons, which are not so good. Remember what the mouth asked of Jesus? “Have you come to destroy us?” The unspoken answer of Jesus is, “Why yes, actually! I have come to destroy you and all your works and all your ways.” 1 John 3:8, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” And Paul writes, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). And Jesus himself talks of Judgment Day when he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:41). This is the very first miracle that Mark records, and it teaches us that Jesus has come to destroy the devil and his angels.

Fourth, the devil knows his plight. He gets it. Hell remembers the curse spoken in the Garden. “And the LORD God said unto the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you . . . on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.’” (In the ancient Near East, defeated kings were forced to acknowledge it by pushing their faces into the ground before the victors.) “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Thousands of years passed between that curse and our text, but hell hasn’t forgotten, and now hell’s worst nightmare is starting to come true.

In Jesus, God made good on those words spoken in Eden. To the devil, it was a threat. To us, it is the first promise of a Savior. The death and resurrection of Jesus overcame sin and death, but also won the victory over the devil. For example, when Jesus descended into hell it wasn’t to suffer more; it was to proclaim the victory, right there in the middle of the devil’s own stronghold. And there was *nothing* the devil could do about it. Now Jesus sits at the right hand of Father and reigns over heaven and earth, and there’s *nothing* the devil can do about that either.

Finally, this miracle gives us a peek of something coming on a much larger scale. Inside that ancient synagogue, the people heard one single shriek from one single demon that was being forced to go where it did not want to go. On the last day and around the globe, there will loud choruses of shrieks when the Lord sends all of them where they do not want to go.

Hell knows what’s coming down the pike, and the devil can do nothing but rage at us with hatred and take one last lick at us while on the way out. But remember: 1) Jesus is stronger; 2) His Word is the Word of God, 3) He has good plans in mind for you, but very bad plans for the devil and his angels. 4) the devil can do nothing to stop it. And though God will have mercy on us, He has no mercy for the devil or his demons. Amen.