

Of Demons, Diseases, and the Creation

Luke 4:31-44

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, January 31, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are some things about the creation that even experience can teach you. When you are sick, why do you go to the doctor? Is it to get better? Doesn't that mean that you want to get better and that you do not want to be sick? If that is the case, then I ask you, what is wrong with being sick? It is not a sin to be sick, is it? If it is not a sin to be sick, why do you go to the doctor in order not to be sick anymore? What is so wrong with being sick?

You see, there are some things that even experience can teach you. Experience teaches you that sickness is bad. Who wants to be miserable? Who wants to be in pain? Who wants to be prevented from doing the things that you enjoy doing? Who wants to be prevented from doing those things that God has called you to do? Since a disease or sickness has the potential to prevent you from doing the things that you enjoy and the things to which God has called you, you want to get better. You go to the doctor and take the medicine in order to stop the misery. You have the surgery and endure the recovery in order to get rid of the pain. And in extreme cases you go to the doctor to cure the illness so that you do not die.

Sickness is bad. You do not need a list of Bible passages to tell you that it is bad. Experience teaches you that being sick is bad.

Now then, what if sickness were eradicated? What if there were no diseases whatsoever? What if you never got sick at all? What if you were never miserable and never in pain? What if there were never a weakness in your body at all? What if there were never a virus or a dangerous bacteria invading your body at all?

If that is the case then life would be grand! It would be free from misery. It would be free from pain. It would be free from those things which prevent us from doing the things that we enjoy most. We would be free from those things which prevent us from doing what God has called us to do.

And if sickness and diseases do prevent us from doing what God has called us to do, then even God Himself is against them. His Son rebukes diseases and they are gone.

If all of this is the case then I put it to you that sicknesses and diseases are not a natural part of the creation. They are an intrusion on the creation from outside of it. They do not belong in the creation. They are not part of the creation. They should not be here at all. Even experience teaches us that much. And so here comes Jesus. He rebukes diseases and they depart.

The demons are the same way. They do not belong in the creation either. They are foreign to the creation. They should not be where they are.

When I say that demons are not part of the creation I am not saying that there are things in the creation that the Creator did not create. The Creator created the demons, but He created them to be good because He made all things good. What happened somewhere along the line is that these spirit fell into evil. They should not have fallen into evil, but they did. They followed the dragon in rebellion in heaven against God the Father. They were cast out of heaven and now roam the earth. Our Lord encountered some of them on earth just before their final ejection out of heaven.

What I am saying is that the evil that demons perpetrate upon others does not belong in the creation. The demons possess people. They make people do things contrary to the person's will. They use the person's voice in order to speak. Several demon possessed people cry out with supernatural abilities

and point out that Jesus is the Son of God or Jesus is the Holy One of God. Such confessions are not natural. They are from outside of the creation.

An unclean spirit always seeks death. That is the definition of the unclean. Whether you are in a contemporary hospital setting spraying the hand sanitizer on your hands or you are reading the list of unclean birds in the book of Leviticus, either way you slice it, uncleanness leads to death. In the worst case scenarios uncleanness brings about death. Therefore an unclean spirit is a spirit that torments someone with a view toward killing them. The Gospel of Mark records that a demon possessed man was cast into fire or into water by the demon that was within him. Demons want you to die.

Death is not good. Even your experience teaches you this. Death is not good. The reason that we know death is not good is because we fight so hard to avoid it. We go to doctors. We exercise regularly. We take our medicine. We read fitness books.

When something threatens us with death we are terrified. We are terrified in combat. We are terrified when an armed intruder enters our homes. We are terrified when a driver cuts us off on the interstate. We are terrified because we might die. We are scared to death of a bull. If you are allergic you are scared to death of bees or peanuts. These things terrify us because they might kill us.

Therefore a demon that possesses a person in order to bring about their death does not belong there. An unclean demon does not belong in the creation. It should not be there.

In fact, while we are on the subject, death should not be a part of the creation. We grieve when someone dies. Why? Don't you believe they are in a better place? Don't some of you rebuke other members of the congregation and exhort them to be glad when someone dies because they are in a better place? But no one feels that way when someone dies. We grieve when someone dies. We want them to be back with us. It is natural for them to be with us. It is unnatural for them to die. Even experience teaches us this, if only we are honest with it. We even grieve people that we don't like when they die.

Death is a curse on the creation. And here we have not only the testimony of our experience, we also have the testimony of the sacred Scriptures. God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat of it. By the sweat of your brow you will produce food for yourself and you will eat the plants of the field. And you will return to the dust, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

God never intended death to be a part of the creation. It is therefore unnatural. Corpses are unnatural. Just look at one whom the funeral director has not doctored up and it will help you understand just how unnatural death is. Adam and Eve were supposed to be alive today. They were supposed to be with us and we were supposed to be with each other and no one was supposed to die. No one was supposed to grieve. No one was to experience such pain as God inflicted upon the creation because of our sins.

Since these things do not belong in the creation, if the Creator is going to redeem the creation, He must get rid of these things, so the Creator comes to a city in His creation. It is named Capernaum. There He encounters His first demon and He rebukes it.

That is what the Creator does with things that do not belong in His creation. He rebukes them and they depart from the creation. In Mark's gospel we read the account of a demon possessed person being healed by Jesus and once he is healed, he is in his right mind and speaking plainly. That is how the creation is supposed to work. The Creator came and rebuked that which did not belong in His creation and His creation was restored. He announced it in Nazareth. Since they tried to throw Him over a cliff, He began His good work in Capernaum in Galilee.

Simon's mother-in-law has a fever. The fever does not belong there. She should not be sick. That is not how the Creator intended His creation to be. And so the Creator rebukes the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law and the fever leaves her. She is then able to return to those things which God had called her to do and she waited on them and served them dinner. The creation was restored and through her she began to restore the creation of others. She fed them.

I know that some women have joked that a woman never gets any rest. Jesus heals her and she winds up serving a meal. But the point is that the creation is being restored. What is so wrong with cooking a meal for others? Does it not provide for them? Does it not prevent death?

And ultimately this is what our Lord's ministry is all about. It is about death. Death does not belong in the creation. If there were no death in the creation, by definition there would be no unclean demons. How can there be an unclean demon if there is no death? If there is no death, there is nothing to bring about death. And therefore if there were no death, there would be no sicknesses either. Every sickness no matter how small is a step toward death. It is a gradual weakening of the body that drags us slowly toward death. Even sicknesses from which you recover weaken the body. After many of these diseases the body is eventually so weakened that it can no longer function and it dies.

This is why the book of First Corinthians exhorts us to take the Sacrament of the Altar in a worthy manner so that we do not get sick and die. This is why the book of James exhorts us to confess our sins to one another so that we may be healed. Illness is simply a prelude to death. If death is gone, illness is gone. If death is gone, the unclean spirits are gone so what our Lord has ultimately done when He came to earth was to fight a war with death.

And so He raises the dead. He rebukes death itself and it flees from His creation.

One of my favorite lines at a resurrection incident is in Luke's Gospel. It has to do with the widow at Nain. She had only one son and he had died. She therefore had nothing. Jesus goes up to the funeral procession and touches the bier. The bearers stand still. They were probably astounded that He touched the bier knowing that it had just defiled Him because of the dead body that was lying there. Then Jesus bids the dead man to get up. The dead man returns to life and, here it comes, Jesus gives him back to his mother.

Death is unnatural because it separates us from each other. Death is worse than TV sets and internet. It separates us from each other permanently. There is no more fellowship with someone after they have died. You cannot call them, text them, talk to them, go see them, laugh with them, cry with them, ask their advice or listen to them. You cannot do anything that would bring joy once they are dead. This woman has therefore lost her only son. Not only is her social standing in ancient times caput but more importantly she has lost fellowship with her only son.

Jesus rebukes the man's death. Death flees from him. Jesus gives him back to his mother. Jesus restores their fellowship. She may now enjoy her son's social benefits in ancient society which will sustain her life, but she will also return to the fellowship that she had with her son before.

And so Jesus has come to rebuke death. He has come to preach its final demise. He has come to rebuke death and rebuke all things associated with it. And His final victory will come in His own resurrection.

And so the final rebuke was given. Death has been rolled back. The dead will rise. But while we are waiting for the resurrection, keep your eyes open you people of God, for in your midst the demons will also be cast out and in your midst the sick will also be healed. In your midst good news will be preached and taught.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.