

Comprehensive Salvation

Mark 1:29-39

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 8, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

If you saw someone cast a demon out of someone else, would it occur to you to ask them to heal your mother-in-law if she were sick?

No, I don't suppose it would have occurred to me either. It would be like asking your exorcist for medical advice.

But that is exactly what the apostles do. They saw our Lord cast out a demon and it is only natural to them to ask her to heal Simon's mother-in-law of her fever.

Perhaps it is because we do not believe in demons. How many of you have seen someone who is possessed by a demon? Since we have not seen demon possession for ourselves we assume that it does not exist. And even if we acknowledge that our Lord cast out demons, we figure that is something that only happened to Him. It will not happen to us. Our modern way of thinking has deprived us of the ability to acknowledge the reality of demons. We figure that these people in the New Testament reports were demon possessed were actually people who suffered from some kind of mental illness. We figure that they were not really demon possessed. We figure that the ancients did not understand things like mental illnesses. We figure that we are much smarter than the apostles and if we were there we would have recognized that the man in the synagogue at Capernaum was merely suffering from some kind of mental disorder. We don't believe in possession. That is the stuff of horror movies. It is designed to scare people for entertainment value.

And Satan likes it this way. Satan wants you to deny his existence. That way he can work on you and you won't even acknowledge that he is there. He can tempt you and you don't even think there is a tempter. And since you don't think that there is a tempter, you will do nothing about your temptations, and you will sin and think nothing of it. You will not repent and you will be condemned to God's wrath. Satan wants you to believe that there are no such things as demons. He wants you to think that there is no such thing as a possession by a demon. That way his minions can possess you and you will do nothing about it. You won't even acknowledge that there is a problem.

Perhaps it is easier not to believe in demons. It is easier to live that way. After all if we confess that demons exist, then we will have to live in fear of them. It is scary to think that things that come out of hell that we cannot see might inhabit our thinking and affect it. It is scary to think that one of them might possess us or someone we love and we would not know what to do. The people whom Jesus encountered who suffered from demon possession could not do anything about it. They were fortunate to have Jesus with them to cast them out. Perhaps we do not believe that Jesus is with us.

And the ancients knew about mental disorders. Luke describes epilepsy and other mental disorders in his Gospel. He records that Jesus healed them just as much as He cast the demons out. Perhaps it is because we do not believe in demons that it would not have occurred to us to ask Jesus the exorcist to heal our mother-in-law.

But now that we have been properly rebuked and now that we are considering the reality of demons, would it still have occurred to us to ask the Lord who cast the demon out to heal the sick? The healing of Simon's mother-in-law is the first recorded healing in Mark's Gospel. So far as we know the apostles had not seen Jesus heal before this and yet they asked Him concerning her. How did they know

He could heal? The only supernatural thing they have seen Him do thus far is cast out a demon. Why would casting out a demon make them think that Jesus could heal Simon's mother-in-law.

If you take John's Gospel into consideration the first miracle of Jesus is when He changed water into wine. Assuming that the apostles knew about water changing into wine, my question remains, how did they know that One who could change water into wine could also heal?

I think it is our modern mind. Just as our modern minds do not acknowledge the reality of demons so also our modern mind has come up with explanations for sicknesses that have nothing to do with God. We think that our diseases are the result of bacteria, viruses, and other damage to the body. While that is true we do not acknowledge why those viruses, bacteria, and other damage bring sicknesses to us. Could not our bodies have been constituted in such a way that they resist diseases? Could not our bodies have been made in such a way that they would not succumb to viruses? After all we do believe that God made us, do we not? Unless we deny that God made us, the question has to be asked why do these things in the environment bring us such harm?

But that is just it, isn't it? The modern mind denies that God made us. The modern mind says that there is not evidence either way on the whole God question. The modern mind denies that it was created and because it denies that it was created it never occurs to it to ask why these things in the environment harm us. They are simply there and they must be dealt with. Because the modern mind deals with diseases on that level it never occurs to the modern mind that there is a spiritual explanation to our physical diseases.

Why do certain bacteria harm us? Why do certain viruses harm us? Why are there certain conditions in our body that bring harm to us? And ultimately why do these things bring about our death? If we acknowledge that God created us then we must ask why He put these things in the creation that kill us.

The reason is that God has cursed the creation. He said it in poetic language in the beginning. He told Adam that the ground was cursed because of him. He told Adam that the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles. He told Adam that by the sweat of his face he would work the earth to bring forth food from it. He told Adam that he was made of dust and to dust he would return. At that point all kinds of things were placed into the creation that return us to the dust. There are all kinds of things in the creation that are designed to kill us.

Diseases are just one example. There are others.

Folks, let me be clear, I am not saying that there are no such things as bacteria, viruses, or other diseases. What I am saying is that those things are in the creation as a result of God's curse on our sins. That being the case it is no wonder that we prefer to explain our diseases merely in scientific or medical terms. If I am dealing with my disease in a scientific way or a medical way, then I do not have to confess my sins. I do not have to acknowledge that it is my own wrongdoing that got me into this fix. But then if I acknowledge only a medical explanation for my sicknesses and diseases and deny the spiritual explanation for them, then I will never turn to God for help when I am sick. I will never pray to Him for healing. It will never occur to me that the One who can cast out demons also has the power to heal the sick.

The apostles, God bless them, as much trouble as they had understanding Jesus later on, have no trouble with this. If He can cast out demons, He can heal the sick. Both demon possession and sicknesses are a result of our sins and God's curse on the creation. Jesus is here to remove God's curse on the creation and to recreate the creation over again. In order to being doing that, He casts out the demons and heals the sick. He restores the creation to what He created it to be.

And even you folks know that. You do still request prayer from me when you are sick. Sometimes you request prayer from me privately and not in the Divine Service and sometimes you request prayer from the congregation in the Divine Service. You have not given yourselves totally over to the devil's deception.

Even our congregation in her pastoral practice acknowledges the spiritual dimensions to our sicknesses. You still have me visit the sick in the hospital. You still have me fulfill our Lord's commands recorded in James, chapter five. You have me hear the sick person's confession of their sins. I absolve them in the name of Jesus. I anoint them with oil and pray over them. And you folks many times when you hear that a member of the congregation is ill, you yourselves go and visit them in the hospital to see how they are doing and you may pray with them as well. Even in your sicknesses you turn to Jesus for help. You turn to Jesus for healing. Which means that you know that when the doctor performs his vocation it is actually Jesus working through the doctor. It is a great blessing when the doctor believes in Jesus also and is aware of His great power supporting the doctor in his vocation, but Jesus will work even through unbelievers to accomplish your healing.

I must say even the modernists are acknowledging the glory of Jesus in this regard. Several decades ago the opinion of the medical community was that pastors were in the way when they came to the hospitals to visit the sick. But then even the medical community noticed that the people who were visited by their pastors and prayed to God go better faster than those whose pastors did not visit them and who did not pray. A study was even done where people prayed for a certain group of people and did not pray for another group of people. The people who were sick were not told that there were people praying for them in order to make sure that they did not get better through some kind of psychosomatic effect. It turned out in that study that the people who were prayed for got better faster than the people who were not prayed for. Interesting. You would think that your Lord was at work.

So what does the medical community do? Well, first off, they allow me to visit the sick and encourage me to do so. I have free parking at Carle's parking garage. All I have to do is flash my clergy badge and they let me go without charge. Hospitals now hire chaplains. Both Carle and Presence have full time chaplains that work with people and pray with them. Many hospitals do.

And what about the Church? We have parish nurses here at Immanuel. Parish nurses stand as signs that the community that follows Jesus the healer is a community of healing. Jesus has always given to the members of His congregations various gifts of healing. Christians since ancient times have healed the sick. When a plague struck an ancient Roman town the Roman pagans would flee from the town fearing contagion or the wrath of one of their false gods. The Christians would go into the communities to care for the sick. According to the power of the Lord Christians built up immunities to many of these disease and therefore resisted diseases to which the Roman pagans succumbed. The Romans saw the power of the Lord in them and converted to Christianity and started following Jesus.

And here once again Satan tempts us with modern thinking. He says to you that it is not the power of Jesus that protected the Christians. It was rather the immunity that they built up in their bodies. Well, dear Satan, the Christians would not have developed such immunities if they had not followed the command of their Lord to care and love their neighbor.

Western civilization takes it for granted that everyone should receive health care. What they conveniently forget is that it was the followers of the healer from Nazareth who taught them that. We did not by caring for the sick. The followers of Jesus invented hospitals and look how many hospitals were founded by Christian groups.

So all is not lost. You still look to Jesus for your healing. Look to Him also to cast out your demons. For the One who can do the one can also do the other. Both demon possession and diseases are

result of our fall into sin. The Lord who casts out demons therefore is the One who is here to redeem and restore His creation and therefore He is also here to heal us of our diseases.

And Jesus preaches. He preaches.

He claims that is why He wants to go out from Capernaum to the surrounding towns. He wants to preach. In fact even though He healed all kinds of people on Capernaum, He leaves some people there who were sick so that He may also preach. The One who casts out demons and the One who heals the sick is also the One who preaches. He preaches. He has a message. He has something that He wants to tell you.

If the casting out of demons and the healing of the sick are the beginnings of our Lord's restoration of His creation, then His message will have something to do with the restoration of His creation. His preaching will have something to do with your salvation. And it is no surprise that when He does preach, His preaching heals people and His preaching casts out demons.

It is therefore important to heed the preaching of Jesus. For when you heed the preaching of Jesus, your demons are cast out and your diseases are healed.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.