

“THE DAY JESUS CAME TO TOWN”

Lk 4:31-44; I Cor 12:31b-13:13

(Jer 1:4-10)

Back in the 1960s there was a television show which reenacted great historical events. I'm dating myself, but the show was hosted by Walter Cronkite and each episode began with the words, "All things are as they were then, except YOU, ARE THERE!" Imagine yourselves in the synagogue in Capernaum that day. You've been there before, many times. Today, however, there was a guest preacher. And while you've heard countless sermons – some good, and some... well, some better than others – but you've never encountered preaching like this before. This was different. **He** was different. He spoke with an authority that was unlike any other. It was as if He were the author of the very Scriptures he was expounding upon. And unlike other sermons you've heard, you wished they'd never end.

But that wasn't the only astonishing thing that happened in the synagogue that day. There was this man. You didn't even know who he was. He seemed ordinary enough, until he so rudely interrupted Jesus. And what he said... well, He seemed to demand that Jesus leave us. ***"Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God."*** That's what he screamed. And, to be honest, that's what we were all thinking... that to some degree he was holy. We acknowledged His holiness. But to destroy us? Why would he say such a thing? Was there some truth to his words? Did he know something we didn't? We knew that you don't trifle with the holy. Was there something more important happening here than we realized...?

But then, as suddenly as it began, it was over. Jesus spoke again, but this time, He didn't argue with the man. He simply commanded, ***"Be quiet! Come out of him!"*** We'd heard stories about unclean spirits and people possessed by them, but we never witnessed it firsthand. To realize that this darkness could be so close to us, unseen and unknown, was truly disturbing. Were there other demons among us? But it happened exactly as Jesus commanded. The man fell silent, collapsed to the floor, and the disturbance was over. Just like that. Jesus' words were not only astonishing, they held undeniable authority. What He spoke wasn't just true; it became reality.

At coffee hour after the service, we were all talking about what happened. But Jesus didn't stick around. He went straight to Simon Peter's house. And there, it happened again! Just as He had rebuked the evil spirit, He also rebuked the fever in Peter's mother-in-law. Some mocked Jesus, because who argues with a fever? But it left as quickly as it came. And it was more than just the fever disappearing. In my experience, recovering from a fever takes days. But she was immediately restored to full health. She arose and began to serve them as if she had never been ill at all. His words brought about change.

Once word of these healings spread, there was no holding back the crowds! People who were sick and suffering appeared from everywhere. Everyone was desperate to see Jesus. And Jesus met them all with patience and kindness. ***He never boasted or acted arrogantly. He was never irritable or resentful.*** Instead, He was overflowing with joy. So many before Him had spoken this way, but their words were like empty noise, ***"like a noisy gong or clanging cymbals."*** Jesus was different. He continued to give of Himself, tirelessly. He preached, and miracles followed.

And He healed them all, everyone who came to Him. Some called Him the Great Physician. But He was so much more. There were more demons than any of us could have imagined, lurking among us. And they acknowledged Him, calling Him the ***"Son of God."*** But He silenced them, not out of fear, but out of a desire to just help... To heal their suffering... To set them free from the grip of evil... To offer them hope... To love them unconditionally... And He was masterful at it.

We watched for a while, but as the night wore on, it became clear that the line of people seeking Jesus was endless. The next morning, we sought Him out, eager to hear more, to witness more, to receive more of His presence. But He was leaving. ***"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well,"*** He said. ***"Because this is why I was sent."*** A wave of sadness came over the crowds, remember? It had been such an amazing day! And we wondered, what about when we got sick? We couldn't help but wonder if He would be there for us then...

But there was another question that lingered in my mind: ***"I was sent for this purpose,"*** He said... But ***who*** sent Him? Certainly not the Pharisees or Sadducees – they were openly hostile towards Jesus... jealous, in a word. Could it be related to what the demons said? ***"You are the Holy One of God; you are the Son of God."*** Could the One who resided within the Temple now dwell in this man from Nazareth? Not to bring destruction, but to purify, to forgive, to make us holy?

It seemed impossible, or at least unlikely. Cleansing, forgiveness, holiness – that required sacrifices—blood sacrifices. They weren't easily obtained, not freely given. They were costly. And they required the priesthood. Ordinary people couldn't enter the Holy of Holies; only the priests were permitted. Yet, the evidence was undeniable. People were being cleansed, forgiven, and made holy. The sacred work that transpired within the Temple was now occurring in Capernaum, in Nazareth, in Samaria, in Cana, in Tyre, in Sidon, and everywhere Jesus went...

The prophets, like Jeremiah, promised such a day, when ***"God Himself would come to shepherd His people."*** Then, we remembered the words of John the Baptist, spoken by the Jordan River: ***"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."***

It's been a few years now, since that day in Capernaum, but looking back, I remember that this same Jesus was crucified on Passover, the very day when all the lambs were sacrificed. And I think about His words from the cross – words of priestly authority! He forgave those who crucified Him. He offered comfort to the thief hanging beside Him, just as He had shown compassion that day in Capernaum. Even in the midst of suffering, even while mocked by men and demons, Jesus remained filled with love. ***"Patient, kind, and without resentment"***, He willingly ***"offered His body"*** to bear the wrath of God on the cross...

Even on the cross, His words held surprising power and authority. He declared that the repentant thief would be with Him in Paradise that very day. Forgiveness was now offered to all – to criminals, to those who had crucified Him, and yes, even to us.

That day in Capernaum, I was seeing ***"dimly, as in a mirror."*** ***Now, everything is so much clearer.*** Even more deeply, I know He sees me. Back in the synagogue, I was just one face in the crowd, yet it felt like He was speaking directly to me. And He was. He knew the depths of my heart, my every sin. It was as if He could see right through me... the recent argument that had left me angry. The harsh words I'd spoken... the neglected responsibilities... the impure thoughts that had crept into my mind... the envy I harbored towards others, despite knowing I was ***no*** better than they... the way I neglected prayer, dismissing it as insignificant... the way I prioritized worldly pleasures over spending time with God's Word.

He knew it all, every single sin. Yet, despite this complete knowledge, He spoke those astonishing words of forgiveness to me: ***"I forgive you all your sins."*** And I was cleansed. His words carried undeniable authority. And even now, He offers you and me His body!

The body once offered on the cross, the blood once shed there, is now offered to us, to make us holy. We're now in the Holy of Holies.

“Take, eat,” He invites. ***“Take and drink.”*** ***“The Lamb of God.”*** The Passover Lamb. ***“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”***

Because in truth, you WERE there that day, in the synagogue in Capernaum. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that they're here with you now. ***“The angels, the archangels, and all the company of heaven”***—they're all here. Because Jesus is here. For you.

What were you truly seeking when you came here today? You came here for Jesus, right? Not because He needs you, but because you desperately need Him... just as the people flocked to Jesus in Capernaum! You yearn to be freed from the grip of sin, from the constant pull of temptation. You need to be made whole again, restored to the image of God. You need His love and the hope that death won't be the end of your story. You need to hear words that have the power to transform, not just the empty promises of a politician, but the life-giving words of a Savior.

You long for comfort in your darkest moments, a friend who will never abandon you, who will always be there for you. You crave a love that sees you completely, flaws and all, a love that accepts you without reservation. You yearn ***“to be fully known”***, yet totally safe, to rest in a love that is boundless and unwavering.

And there's only one place to find that kind of love – a love that ***“endures all things, a love that knows no end.”*** It's found in the Holy of Holies, in the heart of Jesus. He offers Himself to you freely, completely, and unconditionally.

Because He was “sent for this purpose.” Sent by His Father. To Capernaum, and now, to this very place. To you. He came not to condemn you, but to cleanse you from all that is unclean. His desire is to make you His own, to make you sons and daughters of God, holy ones of God, in Him. And He has. You are His. Because what He speaks, becomes reality.

He's loved you with an eternal love, a love that shaped you, that spoke you into existence. Now, live in that love. Because you've received it. You've been filled with His Spirit, overflowing with His grace.

And where you are, He is; and where He is, you will be. This is His promise. And what He speaks, becomes reality. You are forever with Him. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.