

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Epiphany

### Text: Luke 4:31-44 (NIV)

<sup>31</sup>Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. <sup>32</sup>They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. <sup>33</sup>In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, <sup>34</sup>“Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” <sup>35</sup>“Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come



out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. <sup>36</sup>All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” <sup>37</sup>And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area. <sup>38</sup>Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup>So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. <sup>40</sup>When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. <sup>41</sup>Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ. <sup>42</sup>At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup>But he said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” <sup>44</sup>And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

### Theme: Nothing Can Stop Him!

I have often described seminary as a running start to hit a brick wall. When pastors prepare for the ministry, they are excited to get going. We think that people will love our sermons. They will flock into our churches. They will all want to see who this new pastor is. Then when you get to that first call, reality sets in, and you feel like you hit a brick wall. We are all in for a rude awakening.

It often seems to our Lord’s people, whether we are pastors or not, that we are hitting a brick wall when we want to do the Lord’s work. In our text it seems that it was that way to Jesus too, however, the good news of this text is that despite all of the obstacles, nothing can stop our Lord and His work.

I. The devil does all that he can to stop our Lord’s work.

It went that way in our Lord’s ministry. Last week we heard of the time when Jesus preached in His hometown in Nazareth. The people were so upset that they tried to throw Him over the cliff! Then He went to Capernaum. Right in the middle of the sermon a man with a demon shouted at the top of his voice, “*Ha! What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.*” Then Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter. What happened there? The cook came down with a fever.

It seemed like nothing in Jesus’ ministry ever came easy. The pharisees and saducees were always sparring with Him. The disciples were always falling into temptation as we will look at in our lenten services. Eventually, things would fall apart so bad that no one would listen to Him anymore. His followers fled, and His enemies nailed him to a cross.

None of the Lord's prophets in the Old Testament fared any better. In our Old Testament lesson God called Jeremiah into His service. God was blunt with Jeremiah when He said, "*They will fight against you...*" (Jer 1:19) When God called Isaiah, He said that the prophet would preach, but no one would listen until all of their cities would be devastated.

The devil does all that He can to oppose our work for the Lord today. Sometimes there are unforeseen roadblocks. One of my best planned, best attended Vacation Bible Schools ever was in my second year of ministry in the summer of 1990 in Harrow. We had a lot of kids, and everything went great for the first two days. Then the farmer's Co-op burned down that night, and the town had to be evacuated. Our VBS never recovered. Since I have been here, there have been several challenges to our ministries. When Blong was ordained, he was called to Oshkosh. Shortly after Moua began, there was a run on disinfectant wipes, so he had to work a lot of overtime, including Sundays. Other pastors often have the idea that it must be paradise here with all of these ministries, but when you put so many ministries under one roof, there are bound to be challenges, and we have a lot of them.

One of the biggest mistakes that churches make is to approach missions with a theology of glory. We have grandiose plans of how we are going to serve God and grow our congregations. We are going to march with the cross of Jesus, and people will follow us and sing our praises. If we just have the right plan in place, everything will come together. But things never go as planned. There are issues that we never thought of. When new people come, we sometimes don't understand each other. There are conflicts, misunderstandings, and all sorts of problems. Think about positions that you volunteered for. You were ready to serve the Lord with gladness. What was that first council or board meeting like? Was it an uplifting spiritual experience or did you wonder what you had gotten yourself into? When you look at the history of any congregation, it is a miracle that we ever got this far! Missions are always conducted under the theology of the cross. There are hardships and persecution, just as it was for our Lord.

It's that way in our personal lives to. When our children are baptized, we are so excited about their faith. We buy them a Bible, even though it will be several years until they can read it. We are going to teach them to pray and sing songs to Jesus. They are going to love the Lord. Things happen along the way. We begin to neglect some of our responsibilities to raise them in the faith. They encounter all kinds of temptations, and might even get in with the wrong crowd. They do things that are not how we raised them. We begin to ask ourselves, "Where did I go wrong?"

What about some of those people at work or school. You might let your light shine. People know that you are a Christian. Do people respect you for that? Do they seem to want to share your faith? Or are there a number of people who let it be known that they don't like "Holy Rollers" like you?

Then there is our personal faith. At least there, we have some control. But again chaos seems to strike. Do you really pray, read our Lord's Word and attend worship as often as you should? How often does the phone ring at a most inconvenient time when you really wanted some devotional time? Are there times when you have your doubts about God and His ways? Are there times when you are not living as God's people should?

The devil seems to be very good at trying to stop our Lord's work, but

## II. He can never stop our Lord.

It was that way with Jesus' work. In Nazareth He walked right through the crowd that wanted to throw Him over the cliff, and He went on His way. In Capernaum He cast the demon out of the man in the synagogue. Later He healed Peter's mother-in-law, so that she could serve them dinner. He healed many people in Capernaum and the surrounding villages. He preached the good news to the people. When He was nailed to the cross, it was all part of the plan. It was there that He bore the sins of the whole world. He died with a word of victory, "It is finished!" Nothing, not even the devil himself, could stop Jesus from completing our salvation.

It was that way for the prophets also. They were all harassed by the people, but their words were true. After Jerusalem was destroyed, the people remembered their words. They repented and found comfort and hope in those words.

Nothing can stop our Lord and His work today either. I am truly amazed at the blessings that God has given to this congregation, despite all of the obstacles that are thrown our way. The only thing that has led to any success in this congregation is the Word of Christ that is preached in this place in 4 different languages. That word works in the hearts of people. It brings them to know and trust that Jesus Christ is their Savior.

That word works in your personal witness too. I cannot tell you all the kids that I had in confirmation, whom I thought didn't listen to a thing, whom I watch grow and mature in their faith later on. If you have a relative or friend, who is straying from our Lord or rejecting Him, don't give up. Pray for that person. Share the good news when the Lord gives an opportunity. God is full of surprises. He is able to soften even the most stubborn hearts.

His word will work miracles in your life too. Our lives are often filled with a lot of anxiety and guilt. We have big disappointments in life. We might think that our best days are behind us. We might even feel useless. But God's Word will work in our lives too. It gives us faith in God's forgiveness of all of our sins in Christ. It assures us that God will never leave us or forsake us. It assures us that if God called us to His service, He will use us in His service. For Christians the best is always yet to come! God's Word works the miracles of peace, hope, and joy in each of our hearts.

As Christians we need to be realists and understand that following our Lord Jesus is never easy. There are times when we will feel like we hit a brick wall Just as the devil himself opposed Jesus every step of the way, so He will try to destroy our work for the Lord and even our faith in Jesus. But nothing can ever stop our Lord. The devil tried his best, and Jesus still won. He still wins in our lives today. Trust in Him and His word, and you will find that nothing can stop in grace and love from coming into our lives and our world.

Amen.

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