

February 26, 2017    “The Nature of Next”    Luke 4:38-44

Last Sunday we spent our time looking at Jesus ministry at his home town synagogue in the village of Nazareth. The warm welcome he received based on what people had heard of what Jesus did in other towns and villages in the region of Galilee (we saw) turned to anger and hostility when Jesus pointed out that Elijah and Elisha, two highly revered Old Testament prophets did some of their most powerful, God anointed work, with Gentiles. The implication of HIS comments were that Jesus is indeed the Messiah prophesied in the book of Isaiah, and that HE too would share HIS ministry with Gentiles and sinners. The riot that resulted almost led to Jesus death. They hauled HIM to the edge of the cliff at one end of Nazareth and they intended to throw HIM off it.

Didn't happen. God intervened. Jesus dusts HIMSELF off and walks through the midst of the gathered crowd/mob and walked away. So far as we know, Jesus never returned to Nazareth, a point recognized by no less a Reformer of the Church than John Calvin. Here is what Calvin wrote in commentary on Matthew 4:13 on its opening phrases... “And having left Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum...” Calvin: “I have thought it proper to introduce this passage of Matthew, immediately after the passage in Luke 4....because we may gather from the context that, as Christ was wont to frequent the town of Nazareth, so, in order to avoid danger, he now bade a final adieu to it, and dwelt in Capernaum and the neighbouring towns.” Jesus did not return to Nazareth and Capernaum becomes the base of HIS operations as long as HE continued in the Galilee region.

That move to Capernaum is part of what happened next. It is part of the whole strategy in this second year of Jesus ministry.

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I can say as I did about Nazareth, I have been to Capernaum. There was an important connection as to why Capernaum. Jesus has not yet called the 12 to be HIS disciples. However, it is clear that a special friendship has begun to form between Jesus and Simon Peter. Simon Peter's mother-in-law lived in Capernaum. Simon is already showing signs of serious interest in Jesus. Simon Peter's mother-in-law's home becomes the place where Jesus eats, and when HE is in Capernaum it is probably where HE slept, clearly as Peter's friend.

It is also clear that Jesus is still working the synagogues as a place to meet people and find a group of people who are eager to receive what HE has to say, and affording opportunity for ministry, that is being God's servant. So the very next Sabbath after having almost been killed in Nazareth, Jesus is in the synagogue in Capernaum. Once again I can say...been there...inside the ruin. Jesus taught that morning...did the sermon...and people thought Jesus was amazing. They sensed a quality of authority in what HE had to say. The ring of truth. Very positive reviews.

The Capernaum experience was next in terms of time, was like that first year of ministry in the synagogues of other small towns and villages in the Galilee area. Jesus ministry is a hit. So notice this. Galilee has been a string of hits! Nazareth is the aberration with its riot-like results and the threat to Jesus personal safety. So the nature of what is next, is Jesus continues to be regular at going to church, HE gets asked to speak, He accepts, and the people find HIM amazing!

One more thing. There is a man who is in attendance that morning who is possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. The KJV uses the phrase "an unclean spirit" which is another way of saying this

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spirit serves Satan as its master. It disrupts the worship time. Luke is able in his role as historian, to corroborate that it cried out, “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!” That last phrase means it recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus addresses it sternly. “Be quiet. Come out of him!” And it threw the man down on the stone floor, before the whole congregation, and came out of the man without injuring him.

You have not seen that happen in church have you! Here is the point. It happened. And not only did it happen there were discerning people present who were willing to tell Luke the story, and at least part of what they told Luke is this. It raised questions. Some were asking what is this teaching? Where does this fit in a scheme of doctrine? They were impressed by this demonstration of power and authority. Jesus tells evil spirits to come out of people who are so afflicted...and they do. They obey Jesus. So the news spread from Capernaum. And the news is the power of God is in HIM. He delivers the afflicted out of Satan's grasp.

It is a power encounter. And for those who were eye witnesses and told Luke the story or who shared the story with Luke if he himself was there, they said, “Wow. Jesus spoke and God was there and God obviously has the power to deliver people from evil.” It may well have had a greater effect on those who saw it happen and heard the words, than the man who was liberated. It is a moment in which faith blossoms. And the point is it affects the spiritual temperature of everyone who was there. We all know the best publicity an event can have is word of mouth. Word spreads. Jesus is for real and God is with HIM, in HIM, and touches people through HIM.

That is part of the nature of next, of what is next after the near disaster...the moment in which God the Father delivered Jesus out of danger. The cliff was real. It was dangerous. Jesus walked away. Miracles of God's grace is part of the shape of what happens next. And it is not an isolated incident.

The distance from that synagogue's door in Capernaum to the home of Peter's mother-in-law is about the distance from where you are sitting to the other side of Rawdon Creek. My estimation. From here to the other side of Rawdon Creek. The ruin of the house still stands. It was built of stones. Stones that had been gathered together. Don't ask me what they used for mortar I do not know, and I intend to ask this time around in Israel. At Simon Peter's house Simon Peter's mother-in-law is sick with a fever. It was a high fever. The family had gathered. The concern level is high. And they asked Jesus to help. Notice this: Peter has a front row seat. This is not some stranger. This is Peter's wife's mother. The atmosphere is emotionally charged. The big fisherman is strong, and yet he is also powerless. And Peter knows it. Did Peter say, "Jesus, for God's sake do something? Or was it someone else in the home who asked? We are not told that detail. It doesn't matter.

What does matter is that Jesus bent over her. He spoke to the fever like it was the enemy. He rebuked it, which simply means Jesus took charge over it. He told it to get out. And it left her. That fast. It was over. Not only that, if we understand anything about fevers it is this. They leave us weak. We need to recover. Peter's mother-in-law gets up and puts on the kettle to make tea. She starts putting together food and serving the crowd that she is now conscious of in her home. We are often surprised at the fact that Jesus disciples when called to follow him, left their nets "so easily"

and did so. Clearly some of them are standing next to Jesus as HE heals this woman. The earth moves. God is real, and really close. It is a wow moment. No! It is a holy Jesus moment. For Peter life is changing. And he is standing there with his mouth open, not saying a word.

So they ate the meal Peter's mother-in-law prepared. The sun is going down. It is almost the end of Sabbath, the beginning of the next day. Someone makes the observation, there are people out on the lawn. Except there is no lawn. But people have come. And they have not come alone. They have brought all manner of sick loved ones with them. And Simon Peter watches as Jesus tends to them...one at a time...laying his hands on them, one at a time. Healing them. One after another. Some of the sick have evil spirits in them. They are identifiable by the noise these spirits make. In every case they shout. "You are the Son of God," because they know Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour."

It goes on well into the night. Some of those watching actually fall asleep. It has been a long day and night. And Holy God, what to make of it all, how to process what has been happening! When the sun comes up Jesus is not with them. They discover where HE is. HE has gone somewhere quiet, almost private...prayer time? The people find HIM. And yes, HE is becoming "famous." At least, that is what the KJV says. (Luke 4:37). We do this with celebrities. We do not want them to leave. We do not want them to stop performing, more, more we cry. They want HIM to stay in Capernaum.

Jesus says that He must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God in other towns also. HE says, HE says that is what

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HE was sent here to do. HE heads for another town, and HE heads for another synagogue. HE will read the Scripture and HE will teach, and HE will make the broken people HE meets whole again. Because HE understands something else...the clock is ticking. There is a limited amount of time. And the nature of what is next in the life of Jesus in the days of Luke and Peter and Simon Peter's mother-in-law, involves saving lives.

We too have to consider the question what is next for us. What is the nature of next? And God help us if we decide it has to do with something other than proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and being the church through whom, Jesus saves lives.

Let us Pray;

Dear Lord, our God and Comforter, sometimes the miracles of the New Testament create more questions for us than they do answers. Your power was so awesome we are tempted to say. Open our eyes to the reality...your power is so awesome. Your love is so awesome. Your saving grace is so marvelous! Help us to see it and to rejoice. Amen