

"Why He Came"

Luke 4:31-44

February 3, 2013

4th Sunday After the Epiphany

Today is an epic day in America. Millions of people will gather in front of television sets with family and friends in homes, bars, and clubs all across this land. Spectacular television commercials have been crafted specifically for this day. The epicenter of this cultural earthquake will be New Orleans where luminaries from the world of sports, politics, and the business world will gather; where 5,000 press credentials have been issued; where pop star Beyonce will perform in a concert that over 100,000,000 will watch; and where partying will be so intense and long lasting that some have called for tomorrow to be declared a national holiday just so we can all recover. And...oh yeah....there will be a football game, as well.

Some of you as old as me or older can actually remember a time when the Super Bowl *was* a football game (and not a very good one at first – there were 33,000 unsold tickets for the first one) rather than a cultural extravaganza. Now, it seems that the glitter and glitz of the two week build up to the Super Bowl has become so extravagant that the football game almost seems to be an afterthought. Because of all the exciting build up to this event, we sometimes forget the main purpose for the event: a football game.

The same thing can happen when we consider the ministry of Jesus Christ. There was certainly a lot of excitement in what Jesus did in our text for today. While teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, a man with an unclean demon controlling him raised quite a ruckus. Jesus immediately cast out the demon, much to the amazement of the people. Jesus went to Simon Peter's house and cured his mother-in-law of a fever.

Word got out about the excitement in Capernaum and soon people were bringing all who were sick with various diseases and those possessed by demons to Jesus. Jesus healed all the sick and cast out all the demons. The next morning, Jesus escaped for a little quiet time in a desolate place,

but the people soon found him. It was no wonder that they tried to keep Him from leaving them. This must be the Messiah because He was doing all this wonderful stuff for them and wasn't that what the Messiah was supposed to do?

The same thing would happen throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus would walk on water, still storms, and feed thousands of people with a meager supply of food. He would heal countless people, cast out innumerable demons, and even raise people from the dead. The reaction was usually the same. People wanted Jesus to stay and do more of this stuff for them. They thought this was what the Messiah was all about.

But was it? If this was the reason why Jesus came, it wasn't very helpful in the long run. The people He fed became hungry again. The people He healed became sick again. The people He raised from the dead died again. If this was the purpose of Jesus' ministry, it was hardly worth it except to provide some temporary relief to suffering people. You didn't need a Messiah for that. A prophet or two could have done the same thing.

But this display of miracles was not why Jesus came. Jesus Himself tells us why He came. When the people of Capernaum tried to prevent Jesus from leaving them, Jesus replied, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." The reason Jesus came was to preach Good News. It was not an option or a secondary part of His ministry. He said it was something He must do. And it was something God the Father sent Him to do.

The Good News was this: God was coming to intervene in this world with His Kingdom. Evil had corrupted this world. Sin had separated people from God. The devil was in control. And death ruled everything.

The miracles Jesus did *were* acts of love to help people in their suffering, but they were much more than that. They were huge sermon illustrations for Jesus in His preaching. He was illustrating what the Kingdom of God would do. Jesus walked on water, fed people, and stilled storms to show

that God would bring creation back into perfect order under His control. Jesus healed people to show that God would cure people of sin, the source of all their diseases. Jesus cast out demons to show that God was asserting His authority over Satan and his kingdom. Jesus raised people from the dead to show that death would be conquered and destroyed.

It's understandable that these miracles caught people's attention. However, to think that these miracles were the reason why Jesus came is to miss the point. It's like thinking that Beyonce is the point of Super Bowl Sunday. Both are quite noticeable, but quite secondary to the main purpose.

The main point of Jesus' "sermon" would be preached three years later. It would be preached with actions rather than words. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ would be that sermon.

On the cross, the Law of God is preached in all of its severity. Jesus would invade this world to defeat evil and sin by taking on evil and sin. Here, on the cross, we see God's anger against sin which now all rested upon the shoulders of His Son. The suffering was horrific. Here, on the cross, we see God's judgment against that sin. In addition to physical suffering and death, Jesus endured hell by being separated from His Heavenly Father which is what hell is all about. This pain was more intense than the flogging, the crucifying, and the dying. It led Him to cry out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Yet, here on the cross, the Good News is preached in all of its sweetness. God loved us so much that He did not want this to happen to us. He loved us so much that He was willing to let His innocent Son suffer all this so that guilty sinners such as us could go free. Here, on the cross, God's anger was appeased by the Son of God so that now He can be our Heavenly Father and we can be His beloved children. Here, on the cross, God's judgment was carried out on Jesus so that He can declare us not guilty of all our sins.

The Kingdom of God, present in the arrival of Jesus in this world, was established firmly by Jesus' death on the cross. Satan and all evil were defeated that day. On the third day, a new day

was begun – a day of hope and life. By Jesus' resurrection, new life was gained for all of God's people. It is a life that defeats death, transcends the grave, and lasts forever.

This is what Jesus came to preach. He said it in words. He illustrated it with miraculous signs. He brought the sermon to conclusion on the cross. He spoke the final "amen" when He rose from the grave to life again.

Nothing has changed for us today. Let us not make the same mistake as the Jews did and think that the purpose of our Savior is merely to fix our problems, heal our hurts, and make us happy now. He may do those things and often times does, but these are only illustrations of the greater good He has in mind for us.

Jesus is still preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God among us now. He uses the mouths of those whom He has called to preach. "He who listens to you listens to me," said Jesus about the apostles and those who would follow them. Pastors (like myself) are not here to speak our own words and tell you how good you are or make you feel good about yourselves. I am here to call you to repentance for if you hold on to your sin and continue in it, you will experience God's wrath and judgment against it.

But, more importantly, I am here to proclaim the Good News that Jesus has taken your place under God's wrath and has experienced God's judgment for you. Forgiveness has been won. Evil has been defeated. Life eternal is assured. Hold on to that. The Kingdom of God is among us and, although it cannot be seen now, it will be revealed and fulfilled on the final day when Jesus comes again.

And, so, we live life in the Kingdom of God much in the same way as Jesus established it. Following in His footsteps, we minister to the sick; feed the hungry; help the poor; and so on. We do those things, not as ends to themselves (as if these things were the purpose of the church) or simply as acts of love (even though they are).

Our joyful task, like Jesus, is to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God which has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. Our acts of charity serve as sermon illustrations to give people hope for the future. We use them to point them to Jesus and the victory He has won over sin, death, and the devil by His perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection so that sin, sickness, poverty, suffering, and all of sin's side-effects will be overcome and destroyed and when the Kingdom is fully revealed at Jesus' 2nd coming. And we have the privilege, honor, and joy of showing them how to be a part of the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

There were many things Jesus *could have* done when He came into this world as its Savior, just as there are many things we, as His people, could do as the Church in the world. Preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God in word and in deed is why He came and it is why we are here. Amen.