

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Truly Good Doctor

Luke 4:33-44

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice,³⁴ "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!"³⁵ "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.³⁶ 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!"³⁷ And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.³⁸ 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.³⁹ So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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."⁴⁴ And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Do you know a good doctor? Someone new to town might ask you a question like this. How would you respond? What do you consider a good doctor? I think there are a few criteria that everyone would agree are important. You want someone who is able to diagnose well. You wouldn't want a doctor who is constantly guessing at what your problem is and always getting it wrong. You want a doctor who is able to prescribe the right medication. If the doctor knows your problem, but doesn't do anything to help, he is not much of a doctor. But perhaps before you think of either of those things, you think of how well the doctor treats you as a person. You want a doctor who cares. You want her to be friendly and to really show an interest in you. All these qualities go into what makes a doctor good or bad in most people's opinions. In our Gospel reading today, we see Jesus acting as a physician multiple times. In each instance, it becomes very clear to us that he is a truly good doctor (and that is, of course, an understatement).

Our reading begins in the same place we found Jesus in last week's reading: in the synagogue. This time, however, he is not reading from the Scriptures and explaining them as we saw last week. This time he is working one on one with a man who is possessed by an evil spirit. Jesus knew the man's problem. He knew the cause of his problem. This was the work of the devil or one of his henchmen. The words of the demon gave him away. He presented himself as an enemy of Jesus and he also confessed that he knew who Jesus truly was. Jesus knew he had come to this earth to destroy the devil's work and here had an opportunity to carry out a part of that mission with this man. Later, we see Jesus in the house of Simon Peter. Here, he deals with a completely different situation. Peter's mother-in-law is sick with fever. Jesus knows her

problem, as well. She isn't being vexed by the devil. She is suffering as a result of living in a world corrupted by sin and filled with disease and decay. No doubt he knows more about her fever than any doctor at that time or than any doctor would today. In the final verses of our reading, we see Jesus diagnosing the ailments of a wide variety of patients. They all come to him with different problems. Some are sick in the way that Simon's mother-in-law was sick and some are suffering the same way the man who was possessed by the demon was suffering. In either case, Jesus saw and understood what their problem was.

This may seem to be a rather obvious point. Jesus is the all-knowing Son of God. Of course, he was able to properly diagnose these people's various diseases. As obvious as that might seem, however, it is something we sometimes forget. There are many uncertainties in our lives. This is especially true when it comes to our health. When we get sick, one thing that causes fear is the idea that we don't really know what is wrong. We go to the doctor and he or she might not really know what is wrong. It's at a time like this that we need to remember that our good doctor, Jesus, knows and understands what our problem is. There is nothing that escapes his notice. Even amidst our own uncertainty we can go to Jesus, confident that he knows what ails us and he is able to heal us.

That is what makes him a truly good doctor, right? It's his power to heal. If he simply saw people's suffering and understood it but could do nothing about it, he would not be much of a doctor. In our reading, however, we see again and again Jesus' great power to heal. The demon rails against Jesus: "*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!*" But this demon has no power to stop Jesus from carrying out his mission. He must confess that he has met his match. When Jesus tells him to be quiet and come out, he obeys. This is the power that only God possesses. We also see that power on display with Simon's mother in law. How does Jesus heal her fever? He doesn't prescribe medication or tell her to simply let it run its course. He speaks to the fever. He tells it to stop. And it does. This is no ordinary doctor. Only Jesus has such tremendous power over disease. We can see how completely she was healed. She immediately returned to her household duties. There was no recovery time required. She was healed. And if these two examples aren't enough, that evening Jesus meets with patient after patient and sends them away healed. There is no disease he cannot treat. There is no demon too powerful for him. This is the Good Doctor doing what he does best.

We need to understand that there is more going on here than Jesus simply putting on a display of his almighty power. Jesus healing diseases was a part of his mission of salvation. Why did those diseases exist in the first place? Before sin entered the world, there was no such thing as a fever or any other kind of sickness. But with sin came sickness and death. As Jesus healed these sicknesses, he also realized that he had come for a much greater mission—to heal these people from the cause of their disease—the problem of sin. In Matthew's account of Simon's mother-in-law's healing, he quotes from the prophet Isaiah: "*Surely he took up our infirmities and our diseases.*" Throughout his earthly ministry, whenever Jesus healed someone of a dreaded disease, he was, in essence, taking that disease upon himself. That is a part of the burden that Jesus carried with him every day. That is the burden that Jesus took to the cross—all the world's sins and all the punishment those sins deserve, including disease and death. The fact that he willingly took this burden on himself is love beyond our imagination. The fact is, he did it. He suffered and died in our place. And then he performed his greatest operation—he raised himself from death in glory. In so doing, he guaranteed our forgiveness—our healing from sin's

disease—and assured us that we will one day follow him with a glorious resurrection of our own. That goes far beyond what we ordinarily think of as a good doctor’s work. He is truly the greatest physician the world has ever seen.

Isn’t it wonderful to know that this truly Good Doctor is there for us at all times? No matter what sickness or disease we experience, we can go to him in prayer and he hears us. We can be at peace knowing that we are in his care. Of course, we understand that having Jesus as our doctor doesn’t mean that we will never get sick. Our sickness might even linger and cause us great suffering. What we can know, however, is that he is treating us in the best way possible for us. We can know that if we suffer, it is not because our sickness is beyond Jesus’ power to heal. He is simply healing us in a way that is beyond our understanding. His purpose may be to draw us closer. His purpose may be to bring us home. One thing we can be confident of in our times of sickness is that we are not suffering as a punishment for our sins. Jesus took the full brunt of that punishment in our place on the cross. Yes, we still live in a world corrupted by sin and filled with disease, but it will not always be that way. With Jesus as our Good Doctor, we can be certain that we will one day be delivered from this world of disease to a world that knows no sickness or pain, crying or death. Nothing in this world—not even the most horrible of diseases—could ever take that away from us.

And so the next time you are awaiting a diagnosis or someone you love comes down with an illness, remember the Good Doctor who is always on call. Not only does he know and understand your problems, he has the power to heal. He will treat you and your loved ones with great care, always looking out for your best interest. You can be confident of that. **Amen.**

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