

Epiphany 4C, 2010

Text: Luke 4:31-44

Title: Anything but Boring

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To many folks, the divine service must seem pretty boring.

The hymns are all straightforward and follow a regular rhythm. There's no laser light shows or praise band going wild. No one rocking out on the drums or playing crazy riffs on the guitar.

We stand up and sit down, but that's about all the moving around you do. No one's dancing in the aisles, leaping for joy or waving their hands in the air.

The most boring part is probably the sermon. If you're going to catch a nap, this is the time to do it.

In other places, the preacher gets all worked up and emotional- pacing, shouting, and wiping his brow.

And the congregation responds to show their agreement with the preacher with an "Amen" or even an "Alleluia."

But not you Lutherans. You sit quietly and politely. And even if you're not really listening, at least you're good at pretending.

Today Jesus gives a sermon. Jesus is up to preach in the synagogue.

Most synagogue services were pretty boring, too. There were Scripture readings and prayers, and a preacher would give a sermon and everyone would listen quietly and politely.

But not today. Today there's a commotion in the synagogue. Today's service is anything but boring.

A man starts shouting at Jesus with a loud voice. Actually, it's not really the man, but the demons inside of him. "I know who you are! You're the holy one of God!"

The demons know who Jesus is, and they are afraid.

They know that if Jesus is here, then their time is up, that they have to go.

You see, the demons are "unclean" and Jesus is "holy". The two cannot exist together. They are polar opposites.

God is holy. It's His defining characteristic. It's what makes God God. God's holiness is His perfection, His goodness, His life, everything that makes Him who He is. God is holy. To be holy is to be like God.

The demon, our text says, was unclean.

In the Bible, unclean does not just mean physically dirty, it means unholy, the complete opposite of who God is. It means that someone is ritually unclean, unable to come into the presence of a holy God.

Remember what Isaiah said when he saw the Lord in His temple, and the angels flying around saying "Holy, Holy. Holy?" He said, "I'm a dead man! My lips are unclean!" Isaiah knew that he was in trouble because He was unclean, he was not fit to see the Lord.

When you hear "unclean", think evil, imperfect, disorder, darkness, and death. To be unclean is to be in rebellion against everything godly.

Some spirits are unclean. They chose to rebel against God and go their own way. Instead of life and light, these spirits bring darkness, disorder, and death. Those afflicted by these spirits live lives of chaos and suffering.

Before God comes to us, we are all unclean. Even if we're not possessed by a demon, the spirit inside of us is unclean. We are all born sinful, rebels, enemies of God, until we are brought to Holy Baptism.

A baptism will traditionally begin with an exorcism. The pastor says, "Depart you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Baptism is not about washing some dirt off our bodies, but about making us clean, inside and out. Clean and holy, filled with the Holy Spirit. Holy Baptism- the baptism that makes you holy.

Yet even once the Lord has made us clean, we go out and dirty ourselves once again. We chose to rebel and go our own way. We chose the way of dirt and darkness and death. We chose chaos and disorder. We make ourselves dirty.

As a new father, I'm learning lots about how to clean up someone who gets dirty. No matter how clean we get Zachary- we bathe him, wash him, dress him in clean clothes- no matter how clean he is, I know that in a matter of hours, he's going to need to be cleaned up again. But we still clean him up anyways.

God is the one who cleans us up. Every week the absolution washes us clean once more. His body and blood clean us from the inside out. God makes us clean, fresh, new, and alive. He knows that it won't last long. We know that it won't last long. And yet we still need to be cleaned up, and the Lord is happy to do it.

It's His word that does the job.

In the gospel lesson the people are amazed at the authority of Jesus' words. When Jesus speaks, it happens. When Jesus tells the demon to come out, he does. When he commands Peter's mother-in-law's flu to leave, it does.

Jesus' words bear the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who makes us holy. The man in the synagogue was made holy because Jesus' words filled him with the Holy Spirit, and the unclean spirit left.

You are made holy through Jesus' words- I baptize you, I forgive you, this is my body, this is my blood. Word, Spirit, Holiness.

But it doesn't stop there. God makes you holy for a reason. God fills you with His Spirit for a reason. God makes you like Him for a reason- to live a life of service to him.

God has made you holy so that you can do holy things, so that you can do godly things- bring life and light and order and goodness to the world around you.

Look at Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus healed her from her fever, and what does she do next? She begins to serve Jesus and His disciples.

What are you to do, once Jesus makes you clean and holy? Serve Jesus and His disciples. Find ways to bring life and light into the world around you.

Knowing who Jesus is doesn't make you holy. The demons all knew exactly who Jesus was and what He had come to do. No, your knowledge about Jesus is not what makes you holy.

Some folks think that you come to church to learn about Jesus. Church is a place to get information, kind of like school.

And then when they think they know enough, or decide that they can learn about Jesus on their own, they stop coming.

You do not come to church to learn about Jesus. You come to church to hear Jesus. You come so that He can speak to you and touch you and change your life, cleansing you from your uncleanness and making you holy.

Those people who came to Jesus to be healed did not come to learn about Jesus. They didn't come for information. They already knew who Jesus was. They came to be healed. They came to have their demons cast out.

And that's why you are here today. You know that you're unclean. You've been living out there in a world of chaos and death and darkness, and you want something different. You've come here to be changed. And you won't be disappointed.

Today you will hear Jesus speak, and His words will make you holy, fill you with the Holy Spirit. Today you will taste Jesus' words, cleansing you and making you holy.

It's anything but boring. Those church services that look like rock concerts or theatrical productions are pretty ordinary.

But here Jesus comes to speak. And when Jesus speaks, things happen. It's anything but boring.