

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany/February 7, 2021
Isaiah 40:21-31/Hearing God's Word
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Have you not heard?”

Greetings Grasshoppers! Sounds like the beginning of a Karate Kid movie or Kung Fu episode. Funny how it seems rather deep in the context of the martial arts and eastern philosophy but somehow insulting when used to describe our relationship with God.

Actually, this perspective as it is employed by the prophet Isaiah is a revealing introduction that gives great insight into what is happening in our Gospel text, which is all about the kingdom of heaven coming to earth. Remember the kingdom is all about the King who sits enthroned above His subjects, the king spreads His kingdom to cover the earth and brings princes and earthly rulers to nothingness

This is precisely where our Gospel reading ends up today. Christ the King is bringing the prince of this world to nothing and making the earthly religious rulers as emptiness; cleansing the synagogues with His preaching and teaching more thoroughly even than He did in turning over the tables of the money changers and driving them and the animals they sold out of the Temple with a whip.

This business of demons in the synagogue we have heard about the past two weeks is rather curious isn't it? What's up? Isn't the synagogue the house of God where His Word was being taught?

Well, yes and no. The Word was there, but it was being misused and abused; twisted into every sort of false teaching. Remember, satan is the Father of lies, prowling around like a hungry lion seeking whom he may destroy. Here is something interesting about lions, and I

suppose predators in general, experts tell us by the time you see a lion for the first time he has seen you 100 times. Think about what that means. It's not like the demons were not in the synagogue before, it is just that they had no reason to show themselves. No one was bothering them and they were allowed to go about their business in the false teaching; that is until the King shows up.

The synagogue was full of scribes teaching God's Word as precepts, principles, and proverbs for better, more godly, successful, and productive living. It was full of Pharisees making and enforcing all sorts of rules and codes of conduct that would ensure the people of a place in heaven someday and prove their worthiness as children of Abraham and chosen of God.

With Jesus preaching the kingdom of heaven is being spread out and there can be no demons in heaven in the presence of the King. Neither can there be sickness or suffering or sorrow. This is demonstrated in the healing of Simon's mother-in-law and all those gathered at her door.

But this doesn't last. No wonder Jesus withdraws to pray. It must have been exhausting. So, when His disciples seek Him out and tell Him that there are more who are looking for Jesus and His healing: [He says] to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

What is that preaching? And why is it more important than healing the people?

Here it helps to get in to the original language a bit. The sick brought to the door are really the "I am badly" people, so they are brought to face the door. There is a lot more at stake for a lot more people. It appears Jesus is focusing in and moving along with His ministry and

journey to the cross. As He says earlier in this Gospel in v. 15: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Gospel.”

One would imagine His prayer would have included something along the lines of what He would teach His disciples, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In our small catechism, Luther wrote: “What does this mean? God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.

In order to accomplish this Jesus not only had to leave that village and its people behind, but he had to leave the world behind and ascend into heaven from whence He comes to judge the living and the dead. So, though He must come out of that place and move on, we get a glimpse of His kingdom coming wherever He goes, wherever He preaches.

Judgment began in His earthly ministry as we see in the healing and casting out of demons. The judgment is finished on Calvary once for all on Christ that we might be judged righteous. Now that judgment is being delivered for all who are gathered by the Holy Spirit to face the door of heaven where Christ is preaching and casting out demons still, while judgment for all who refuse to be gathered to Christ now is withheld; until the Last Day when the judgment will be fully revealed.

That judgment begun in Jesus earthly ministry continues today in His Church. For judgment is but the declaration of God that calls and makes a thing what it is. It's all about the King and what He does for His subjects, His people. So, Grasshoppers, dear baptized and beloved children of God, it ought neither surprise nor offend anyone when there is judgment in the church. Where the Word of God is spoken with judgment, demons are cast out. "I am badly" people are declared to be forgiven and made to be "I Am's" holy people.

That is why our Lord, the great I Am, brings you to church often to hear His preaching that judges your righteous for Christ's sake and cleanses you of any evil spirit you may pick up in the course of your daily wanderings and earthly existence. The preaching of God's Word judges, you to be holy, by Christ's life, work and for His sake, and so you are. The preaching of God's Word declares the water of Baptism to wash away sins and so it does. The preaching of God's Word makes the bread and wine to carry the body and blood of Christ and so they do.

So truly, the kingdom of God is near and you are gathered to face the King at His very door. In the preaching of the Word, God's kingdom comes, God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, and all of your sins are forgiven so you, grasshopper, will live forever in the new heavens and the new earth.