

Anglican Church Noosa
Luke 4:31-44 Contentious Jesus
Week 2 | Authority
Preached by Rev'd Chris Johnson

Have you ever wondered what 24 hours in the life of Jesus would have looked like? That's what we have in our passage this morning. We're not going to look at a complete day, but from one morning to the next.

In v31 we discover, Jesus is in Capernaum, it is a Sabbath and he is teaching the people.

Where is Capernaum? It is at the northern end of Sea of Galilee. [Map] You might note where Nazareth is. Remember last week he was in his hometown of Nazareth in the synagogue where he read from the prophet Isaiah. He then claimed he was the fulfilment of that prophecy. How brazen, what a contentious young man he gets run out of town.

So he's now walked from Nazareth down to the Sea of Galilee and the town of Capernaum. It is 42 kilometre walk between the two towns. The road passes through the Turan Valley and drops some 550 metres down to the sea of Galilee. Jesus just had to follow his Google Maps and he wouldn't have got lost!!!! [Map]

So Jesus is in Capernaum on the Sabbath and he goes to the synagogue. Here is a picture of the ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum. There are two things that happen there that amaze the people and establish Jesus' authority.

- Firstly, is his teaching. v31
- Secondly, he drives out a demon. v35

Well we all know Jesus' teaching is amazing. We're not told what he taught that day but we certainly get plenty of his teaching in the rest of Luke's Gospel. And it is amazing!

But what about casting out a demon? Many people in our Western society would say that the man had a medical condition for which they had no other explanation in that day so they said he had a demon. Today we would have a medical diagnosis. Many people however, outside of the West, have witnessed the demonic first hand and have no trouble accepting his passage at face value.

So what are we to make of it?

What I think is definitive is that Jesus treats this entity as a demon, speaks to it as a demon, and there is an obvious spiritual battle going on. In this passage and indeed throughout the Gospel a distinction is drawn between physical healing and the casting out of demons. Remember Luke is a doctor, who you would think might be more interested in physical healing rather than the demonic, yet he doesn't hesitate to report Jesus casting out demons as well as physically healing people.

In fact, demons are mentioned 23 times in Luke. And I think the reason Luke reports these incidents is that he is very aware that Jesus is involved in a spiritual battle against evil. If you look at the start of Chapter 4 you'll find Jesus is locked in a do or die battle with the devil himself. This sets up the spiritual battle of the next three years.

- It is a spiritual battle where his teaching will raise the ire of the Jewish authorities.
- It is a spiritual battle with the demonic, sickness and death.

What I think is interesting is that there seems to be much greater activity of the demonic around the life of Jesus than there is in the Epistles and the life of the early church, or in the history of the church since. And maybe it is because Jesus' pure goodness is what attracts all the forces of evil to try and overthrow him and defeat his mission.

We have entitled our series 'The Contentious Jesus'. Well, here is a real point of contention for the Western world. Jesus takes demons seriously and casts them out with a calm and assured word. If Jesus is Lord, then he has authority, and there is no place for the demonic. People are restored and made whole once more.

In our story the demon recognises that there is a battle about to be fought. "*Go away*" he says "*Have you come to destroy us?*" The demon admits that he knows Jesus identity as "*the holy one of God*". The battle lines are clearly drawn between the chaos of the demonic world and the holiness of God.

Jesus rebukes the spirit with a simple command, "*Be quiet, Come out of him!*" It would appear to be a violent exit as the man is thrown to the ground, however he is uninjured.

What is the reaction of the crowd? v36 amazement, because of Jesus' authority and power. They have seen it in his teaching and now they see it in action.

Next stop in Jesus' day is Simon's home. This is Simon Peter the chief apostle. Simon lived in Capernaum.

Simon has his mother-in-law living with him and she is very sick. Our translation says '*a high fever*' which may mean it was even life threatening. But Jesus heals her.

Jesus rebukes the fever and Simon's mother-in-law is immediately well. Normally after a fever, it takes a few days for your body to fully recover but here her strength returns immediately. So what does she do? She gets up and serves Jesus and those gathered in the room. There's an old saying that we are saved in order to serve, and that is exactly what Simon's mother-in-law does.

That evening many people arrive on the doorstep. Word must have got around, 'Jesus is in town'. There are people with demons which Jesus casts out; and people with various kinds of sickness - so just imagine it, possibly respiratory illnesses, tummy upsets, bung hips and knees, maybe toothaches, genetic illnesses, and probably people who were disabled. You can just imagine the bustling crowd at the door of the house all longing for a cure, all wanting Jesus attention. Jesus has compassion for them all and we are told he laid hands on them and healed them.

It is interesting that Jesus uses the same Greek word EPITIMAO in these three incidents throughout the day. It means REBUKE;

- In v35 with the demon in the synagogue it was translated, "*Be quiet.*"
- In v39 with Simon's mother-in-law it is translated rebuke, "*He rebuked the fever.*"
- A little later at the door in verse 41 the same word is used against the demons. "*He rebuked them and wouldn't let them speak.*"

So three times Jesus rebukes. Two times with demons and once with sickness. Jesus has authority. He speaks a simple word and it happens. There are no long incantations, no song and dance, just a simple rebuke and the demon is gone, the sickness is gone. And this is the consistent way Jesus heals. His authority is absolute.

We are not told how long the crowd lingered that night at Simon's house but I imagine it could have been late into the night. After all if you were healed of a nagging illness, or maybe a serious one, wouldn't you run and get your family and friends who were also suffering in any way and bring them to Jesus. I imagine a real buzz going around Capernaum that evening. The amazement at the synagogue earlier in the day would have continued.

We don't know what time Jesus got to bed that night but we told the next day as the sun was rising Jesus went out to a solitary place. v42 After such a busy time the previous day Jesus could easily have made an excuse to sleep-in, but instead he is up early and praying. I can easily see myself in this sort of situation saying "I'm too busy to pray" but for Jesus it was a case of 'he was too busy not to pray.' He needed the assurance of his Father's presence and the strength only the Holy Spirit can give. He prayed.

But what about the next bit. It's really puzzling isn't it.

The crowd seek out Jesus and you might expect Jesus to continue his ministry of casting out demons and healing people but what does he say to the crowd? 'Time to move on' He says, *"I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to other towns also because that is why I was sent."*

That's remarkable isn't it; Jesus turning his back on what must have been many needy people there that morning. What this tells me is that Jesus always has a bigger perspective than mine. He doesn't always meet my immediate needs when I want him to. But when I read the whole of Luke I am assured that he is wise, he is good, and I can trust him.

Why did he move-on that day? In his own words he wanted to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to other towns. His mission was bigger than Capernaum. It was a mission for the world. He had to preach in Judea to the south, not just Galilee in the north.

So we have a 24 hour slice of Jesus' life and ministry. What do you make of it? Is Jesus contentious? Does Jesus have authority?

I think Jesus is astonishing. I think one of the questions Luke is teasing us with in this narrative is 'Who is this man?'

And the amazing thing is that the clues are given to us through the demons. They know who he is. They know his authority. But they reject it. As James says in his little book at the end of the New Testament, Ch2 v19 *"You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."*

It's not enough to just believe that God exists. It's whether you are willing to obey him.

The demons are completely accurate in their description of Jesus, but the last thing they want to do is obey him.

How did they describe Jesus –

- V34 He is the Holy One of God
- V41 He is the Son of God
- V41 He is the Messiah

All of these titles for Jesus are completely accurate. So why does Jesus silence them? Jesus seems to be silencing the truth.

Well the only accurate way to truly understand these titles is from the teaching of Jesus himself. The demons might use the right title, but given half a chance they would distort a true understanding of it and mislead the people. And the people were prone to misunderstand. The popular misunderstanding was that the Messiah would liberate them from Roman rule. They wanted a powerful king who would overthrow their oppressors.

But Jesus was going to establish his Kingdom through the cross – a very different path.

So Jesus is going to reveal his identity piece by piece as he journeys to the cross. In this early phase in Galilee it is too soon. There is much more teaching the people will need before they can truly understand who Jesus is as -the Holy One of God, -the Son of God and -Messiah.

Jesus has already dropped the hint that he is the Messiah, when he was in the synagogue in Nazareth. Do you remember the story from last week. Jesus reads a prophecy from Isaiah about the coming Messiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

Well is Jesus setting the oppressed free? Those tormented by demons would say so. Proclaiming freedom for the prisoners? Those bound by their sickness would say so.

Anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear, would be asking, Could this be the long waited for Messiah? The one who has complete authority over all the powers of evil, sickness and death.

My friends are you aware there is a spiritual battle going on in our world today?

I see it in international affairs. This week I was reading about the war in Ukraine. Russian troops have seized 6 times more territory in 2024 than in 2023. More than half the territory Ukraine captured in its surprise Kursk incursion has since been ceded.

We need to pray for Ukraine.

I see the spiritual battle in the persecution of Christians around the world. I want to share with you this prayer point from the Barnabas Prayer Diary.

“Pray that the light of the knowledge of God's glory will shine in the darkness of North Korea. Christians are ranked in the lowest ‘hostile’ class according to the *songbun* system of identifying citizens’ loyalty to the state. They are considered worthy of punishment and execution if their faith is discovered. Pray that our God for whom nothing is impossible, will send revival to this beleaguered nation and communicate His Word powerfully, even in a land where owning a Bible can cost Christians their lives.”

I see the spiritual battle in chronic illness. People facing debilitating sickness yet holding on to their precious faith in Christ as Saviour and trusting in his will and his way. Maybe trusting him for healing, but knowing that it is only in the new heavens and new earth where Jesus reigns as Lord that we will have a resurrection body and be fully healed, truly saved.

I see the spiritual battle when people are happy to talk about God but don't want to consider Jesus. 'God' is a nice general term and people can attach to it any meaning they want to. But talk about Jesus and the heckles are raised- that's too exclusive, too particular, too demanding. If he really is the holy one of God, the Son of God, the Messiah, then ... he must reign, he is the King and he tolerates no rivals. Present this Jesus in the marketplace and watch the spiritual battle erupt.

My friends, Satan is alive and well, and the forces of evil are strong. Jesus knew that, as he embarked on his ministry in Capernaum. And if we are following him we will know it as well. In the end there is no neutral ground, we either acknowledge Jesus as King, or our hearts are caught up in sin, the world and the devil.

So this morning I want you to simply meet the CONTENTIOUS Jesus and his 24 hours of ministry in Capernaum.

- He has authority over the demons, over all the forces of evil.
- He has authority over sickness.
- His teaching has authority.
- He is truly amazing.

Trust him alone as your Lord and King, and live under his authority.