

JESUS IS IN YOUR MIDST RIGHT NOW!

Today's Text: Lk 4: 14-44

Extracts:

Then passing through the midst of them, [Jesus] went His way. Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths, and they were astonished at His teachings, for His word was with authority. Now in the synagogue, there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are- the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region [Lk. 4: 30-37].

Nayara Goncalves is a 20-year-old mobile phone shop manager in the Broward County, Florida, USA.¹ On 23 July 2010, a would-be armed robber stormed into her shop, pointed a gun to her head and ordered her to give him money or face instant death. Looking calm and confident, she said to the attacker, "I am just going to talk with you about Jesus." For nearly five minutes, she spoke hope in Jesus to the man with the gun. Confessing "embarrassed" to be doing what he was doing, the man said that he needed \$300 to avoid being evicted. Goncalves explained that if she gave him such money from the shop's sales she would have to make up for the shortfall. The would-be robber left the shop without money and without shooting! Speaking later to reporters and the police, Goncalves said that she was inspired by God because "I could never be able to think I could talk or preach to someone about what I wanted to tell him." Jesus was certainly in her midst that moment and gave her utterance [Matt. 10: 19-20].

How about you? How can you know or demonstrate that Jesus is in your midst as you face the ordeals of living in an increasingly wicked world where sin has become a civil right? Let us find out from this week's study based on the presence of Jesus in the synagogues in Galilee and how it took demons to recognize Him in their midst.

¹ Story is based on "Christian shop manager dissuades would-be armed robber," a BBC News Report, 30 July 2010; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-10822923

1. Background: It took demons to first recognize Jesus!

How many people in your place of worship can you really claim to know? You may know your family members and close relatives and friends. You may also know the priest or pastor and some prominent church workers. The likelihood is that you may not be able to put names to faces; that you may not even remember who sat next to you last week. Do you know that it is among such unknown people that heavenly visitors can manifest in your congregation? What if one of such visitors was Jesus Himself? How would you feel to know that you missed a unique chance to see or touch Him? People who worshipped in the same synagogues with Jesus two thousand years ago found themselves in a similar situation!

For the first thirty years of His earthly life, Jesus came and went and nobody noticed Him. Then, as soon as He was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove and a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” [Lk. 3: 21-22]. Thereafter, He was *led by the Holy Spirit* into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil for forty days, during which period, He ate and drank nothing [Lk. 4: 1-13]. After defeating Satan in every temptation that he threw at Him, we are told that “Jesus returned *in the power of the Spirit* to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region, and He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” [vv. 14-15]. What “news of Him” was it? You need to get the detailed report before answering that question and that is what this week’s study intends to provide.

Imagine yourself as a news anchorman receiving live reports from your correspondents in the synagogues in Nazareth and Capernaum and from Peter’s mother-in-law’s house concerning Jesus! Their reports could be summarized as follows:

a) *Jesus at the Nazareth Synagogue*

This was the city where Jesus had been brought up. *As was His custom*, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. They gave Him the book of the prophet Isaiah, and He opened the place we refer to today as Chapter 61, Verses 1-2, and read it aloud. He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. With the eyes of all those in the synagogue fixed on Him, He declared, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” [Lk. 4: 16-21].

On every Sabbath day before that day, they had seen the young man come in, read when asked, and go home after service. “Is this not Joseph’s son?” so the people asked even though they marvelled at the gracious words that came out of His mouth. In their view, how could a mere carpenter’s son be proclaiming to have the Spirit of the Lord on Him to preach the gospel to

the poor, heal the brokenhearted and set the captives free? Jesus perceived their disdain and said to them (among other things), “No prophet is accepted in his own country.” The people were filled with wrath. They thrust Him out, up to the brow of the hill, on which the city was built, with the aim of throwing Him down over the cliff. He simply passed through their midst and went His way [vv. 22-30]. *Jesus the Christ was in their midst but they did not know Him!*

b) *Jesus at the Capernaum synagogue*

Capernaum was another city in Galilee. For several Sabbath days, Jesus taught there. The people “were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority” [vv. 31-32]. In their eyes, Jesus could easily have passed as a great teacher until something else happened. In the congregation, there was a man who had an unclean demonic spirit. He cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? *I know who You are- the Holy One of God!*” Jesus rebuked the evil spirit to be quiet and to come out of the man. The demon threw the man in their midst and left without hurting him [vv. 33-35].

The other worshippers were amazed and murmured among themselves, saying, “What a word this is! For with authority and power, He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” The report about Jesus spread like wild fire ‘into every place in the surrounding region’ [vv. 36-37]. *Jesus was in their midst but it took demons to reveal His divine nature* to the congregation. Even so, they still did not know Him!

c) *Jesus at Peter’s mother-in-law’s house*

Simon Peter, at the time an up-and-coming disciple of Jesus, requested Him to come to his mother-in-law’s house because she had a high fever. Jesus went there from the synagogue, stood over her and rebuked the fever which left her immediately. She got up and served Jesus and His entourage [vv. 38-39].

Before sunset, the word had spread that Jesus was in the neighbourhood. So, people with various illnesses were brought to Him. He laid His hands on them and healed them all. *Demons also came out of many, crying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!”* He rebuked them and shut them up “for they knew that He was the Christ” [vv. 40-41]. Here as in the synagogue, it took demons to know that Jesus the Christ was in their midst. At day break, Jesus wanted to go into a deserted place but the people “tried to keep Him from leaving them.” In the midst of economic and other hardships under a brutal Roman Empire, they saw Him as their new succour and healer that they could corner only for themselves. But Jesus

said to them, “I must preach the *kingdom of God* to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” [vv. 42-43].

As the news anchorman, what conclusions could you have drawn from the above reports? Like Jesus, you would also have rebuked and silenced the demonic spirits because it should be those He had come to save, not those going to be consigned to eternity in hell that should first have recognized Him. Perhaps it was not yet time because He had not yet been crucified and raised from the dead. But what would you then say about us who know *for sure* that Jesus is the Christ? Do we have any excuse for not recognizing that He is always in our midst?

2. How to know that Jesus is in your midst

Jesus has said that where two or three are gathered *in His name*, He is there in their midst [Matt. 18: 20]. There is no question that He is present when we gather in our churches to worship. The problem is how many people there *know* that the Lord is *actually* in their midst [Hab. 2:20]? Otherwise, many of us would not misbehave in the church the way we do. We come late. We are lackadaisical or disrespectful in the Lord’s sanctuary. It is as if some of us are daring God to strike some people dead, as He did to the two sons of Aaron, for burning profane incense before the Lord [Lev. 10: 1]. Or, we seem to want to see a couple struck dead for lying about their free offerings, like Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, before the apostle Peter [Acts 5: 1-11]. How do we know those who are gathered in Jesus’ name?

Jesus told His listeners in this week’s Bible text that He came to preach the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not about food or drinks but “righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit” [Rom. 14:17]. Jesus was in Spirit. The demons were evil spirits. *It takes spirit to know spirit*. For the people, it would take a little over two years thereafter for some of them to really know that Jesus the Christ had been the one in their midst all those years. That was after His resurrection from the dead and after some of them had received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. Since Jesus is no longer with us physically, how can we know that He is in our midst *right now*? How do we know that we are gathered in His name?

The word of God says that those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God [Rom. 8: 14], and that as many as have received Jesus, to them He gave the right to be called children of God, to those who believe in His name [Jn. 1: 12]. It adds that no one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 3], and that no one can call Jesus Lord unless he obeys whatever He asks him to do [Lk. 6: 46]. Of course, we obey Jesus because He Himself does the will of His Father [Jn. 5:19]. From those Scriptural truths, we can conclude that those *who are led by the Holy Spirit believe in the name of Jesus, having received Him (by baptism) as their Lord and Saviour and can now gather in His name in spirit and in truth (by faith and obedience). Such are the ones who will know when*

Jesus is in their midst. It is only such people that can rightfully be called “born again” [Jn. 3:3, 5].

Based on your faith [Matt. 15: 28], Jesus manifests His presence among the truly “born again” in several ways, some of which are as follows:

a) *By the breaking of bread*

The two disciples on the way to Emmaus after the Lord’s resurrection did not know that their travelling companion was Jesus Himself until He broke bread for them and vanished. Then their eyes were opened and they said, “Did not *our heart* burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” [Lk. 24: 13-32]. In like manner, when we participate in the Communion service, which Jesus said we should do in remembrance of Him [Lk. 22:19], we have Him there in our midst. That is why Paul has warned that “whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” [1 Cor. 11: 27].

b) *By signs and wonders*

Jesus has promised believers a number of signs that shall follow them, including casting out demons and healing the sick [Mk. 16: 17-18]. Since believers can do nothing without Jesus [Jn. 15: 5], it means those signs indicate His presence. The early church demonstrated it in abundance. For example, as the apostles laid hands on the sick in the name of Jesus and they became well (among other miracles), the Jewish leaders became indignant and locked them up in the common prison “but at night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple, and speak to the people all the words of this life’” [Acts 5: 15-20]. Earlier, when they tried to stop Peter and John from using the name of Jesus, they boldly refused, saying, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” [Acts 4: 16-20]. The Jewish leaders knew that Peter and John were “uneducated and untrained men” but when they saw their boldness, they realized that “they had been with Jesus” [v.13]. In fact, Jesus was in the docks with them that very hour! So He will be with you when you defend Him before evil men and demonic forces.

c) *By revelation*

In the midst of hardship and persecution, Jesus showed up to assure His followers that He stood by His word to never leave them nor

forsake them [**Heb. 13:5**]. For example, as Paul faced stiff opposition from the Jews in Corinth, he became so discouraged that he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” But that night, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for *I am with you*, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Instead of leaving the following morning, Paul spent a year-and-a-half there [**Acts 18: 1-11**]! Jesus was there with him in the battle trenches.

You are in the presence of Jesus each new day, no matter how insignificant or far-fetched it may look. That smile from a handsome total stranger on the bus to school, the morning you looked at your pimpled face in the mirror and believed that you were too ugly! That doctor that advised you against radical surgery but to try more conservative treatments; advice that turned out to be prophetic! That stray bullet that was caught on your bracelets, thus saving your hand from being cut off in a cop-robber shootout! What of the conversation you overheard in the shopping mall that seemed to be addressing the questions you had prayed about concerning the sale of some valuable property? Who made the phone call to the fire department from your empty house when it caught fire while you and all your family members were away at work? And how about that crashing passenger plane that landed safely on the Hudson River in New York a few years ago? Are all those mere coincidences? Not at all! Jesus was in their midst!

3. Conclusion: His name is Immanuel- God with us!

The Psalmist says that the *Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth* [**Ps. 145: 18**]. If you are a person of faith, you will know why you should give thanks to God in everything. It is because Jesus is always in your midst as Immanuel, which means “God with us” [**Matt. 1:23**]! He is your Advocate before the Father [**1 Jn. 2:1**] to defend you against Satan’s evil designs [**Lk. 22: 31-32**]. He is your travelling Companion on the rough road of life to point out the pitfalls to avoid [**Is. 30: 21; Acts 23: 11**]. He is your untiring Comforter who will never leave you as an orphan [**Jn. 14: 18**] but gathers your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings [**Lk. 13: 34**]. He is your Friend [**Jn. 15: 14-15**] who sticks closer than a brother [**Prov. 18: 24**].

Therefore, let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Jesus [**Jn. 14: 1**]. In the world, you will find tribulation, but in Him you will find peace. Be of good cheer because He has overcome the world [**Jn. 16: 33**]. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He is with you always- even to the end of the age [**Matt. 28: 20**] or your last day on earth, whichever comes first. You will never walk alone. He is with you *right now*- listening, leading, caring, cheering and sharing. Alleluia!