

“This Is Why Jesus Came”

Why do bad things happen to good people? That’s a question that gets asked by Christians perhaps as much as it does by opponents of Christianity. People look at the world around them and notice what they feel are inconsistencies between the way people conduct their lives and the things that happen in their lives. It doesn’t seem fair that people try to live good lives but have many bad things happen to them. Perhaps you can think of examples from your own life or in the lives of people you know. We heard a few examples in our Scripture readings this morning. Job was a good man by all accounts. Even God held up Job as an example of faithfulness to his laws and decrees. Yet he suffered, and suffered incredibly, in his life (Job 7:1-7, First Lesson). Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever in today’s Gospel. We have every reason to believe that she was a good person. As soon as her fever was gone, she was taking care of those around her. A good person, to whom a bad thing was happening.

To really answer the question fully about why bad things happen to good people, we would have to consider a fairly wide range of biblical teachings. There are many factors worth thinking about in understanding the question and the answer. It’s not our purpose in this sermon to do that completely, but we will touch on a few things. And one part to the answer of why God allows bad things to happen to good people is that it provides opportunity. Bad things happening in the lives of others provide opportunities for us to help those people and to show love to them. The bad things that were happening to people in today’s Gospel, and there were plenty of them, provided Jesus with opportunities to show his love and to do the very things that he came to earth to do.

First of all, we see that Jesus came to demonstrate his power. Our Gospel this morning that serves as our sermon text is taken from the very first chapter of Mark. This Epiphany season, for the Sundays after that festival, all of our Gospels have been from that one chapter that relates the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He was baptized by John the Baptist and then set out to do his work. He called disciples to follow him, and as they followed him, he did the sorts of amazing things we heard about in today’s reading.

Jesus healed diseases, like the fever with which Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering. And more and more people came to him to heal their various diseases, too. Others came who were possessed by demons. And one after another, over and over, Jesus healed the people and cast out the demons that were affecting them. This is the power that Jesus demonstrated. He could command fevers and other diseases, and they listened to him. No modern medicine could equal what Jesus did for the people who were coming to him. And even demons who were exercising dominating power in the lives of people—even they needed to listen to Jesus. He could command them to keep silent, and they did.

The “why” doesn’t really come up in these verses. Why were so many people sick? Why were so many possessed by demons? The sicknesses we can probably relate to. People get sick. We’re in the middle of another season with news reports of an abundance of cases of the flu. It seems that I hear almost every day about someone else who has gotten sick in some way. My children’s classrooms have all had students absent for illnesses. That’s the world that we live in. People get sick. And we can trace it all the way back to the results of sin entering the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Things changed. People were no longer perfect and the world was no longer perfect. And the world since has been inflicting diseases on people. We are keenly aware of it today.

But what about the other people with whom Jesus was dealing? We don’t seem to hear every day about demon possession, do we? In fact, many people today question whether demons actually exist or if there could be such a thing as demon possession. They assume that back in Jesus’ time people didn’t know about mental health issues the way that we do today, and so they assumed that someone was possessed by a demon when they were really suffering from some other affliction. But the Bible is clear. The devil and demons are real, and they have a real effect on us and our world. And even though it seems today that the devil takes a different approach to disturbing you and me, at the time of Jesus these demons were

clearly active and possessing people. That is, they were until Jesus drove them out, until Jesus demonstrated his power.

That power says something about Jesus. It reminds us that he is true God. He has all power. He is almighty. There is nothing that doesn't bow to his will. Jesus came to demonstrate this sort of power, to put on display, to shine forth as he truly is. This is God on earth. He even commands diseases and demons, and they listen to him. He opposes the work of the devil, and he wins.

And then Jesus does something very different. After a late night of healing all who had come to him, Jesus woke up early and went to find a quiet place. And there, all by himself—his disciples didn't even know where he was—he prayed. Jesus depended on prayer. Even though as true God he controlled and commanded all things, Jesus had become a human being. He had hidden his power and his glory to look on the outside just like you and me. He had put himself in a position where God's expectations for you and for me fell on him in the same way. And so he prayed to his Father in heaven. He had a relationship with his heavenly Father that meant he prayed to him regularly. Right at that time, at the earliest stages of his ministry, Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven and asked him to bless the disciples he had called and the work he was doing and the people he was helping. Jesus came to earth to be a true human being. And as a true human being he depended on prayer.

What an example he is for us! When we have busy days, when there is so much to do, when there are so many things that weigh heavily on our minds, what do we do? Too often we say, "I need to work harder. I need to plan more carefully. I need to figure out the solution, no matter how long it takes." What we really need is to pray. What we really need to do is to remember that we are sinful people in a sinful world. We need to look to our God who has the power to do everything that we need and the wisdom to do it in the best way possible. We need to depend on prayer.

As Jesus was praying, his disciples finally found him. They told him, **"Everyone is looking for you!"** There were more sick people to heal. There were more demons to be cast out. There would be more opportunities like these in this world so corrupted by sin. But that wasn't the biggest need Jesus came to help. Why did Jesus come? Yes, he came to demonstrate power. Yes, he came to depend on prayer. But most of all, at that time, Jesus had come to deliver preaching. So he told his disciples, **"Let's go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."** And that's exactly what they did. We read, **"So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."**

In some ways, Jesus would keep on doing exactly as he had been. He would preach and drive out demons. But he would do so in many places, in many nearby villages. He would not allow himself to become just a miracle worker. He wasn't just an answer to disease and demon possession. And he would go around and preach about that. All along, these miracles were meant to reinforce what Jesus was saying and that he was who he claimed to be. Even more important than dealing with the issues that people had at the moment was that Jesus came to deal with the biggest issue of all: he came to deal with sin itself.

His power against Satan would be put on display most clearly at the cross. His love for people would be most evident when he gave his very life for them. His obedience to the will of his heavenly Father would be on full display as he committed his spirit into his Father's hands. This is why Jesus came: to demonstrate power, to depend on prayer, and most of all to deliver preaching so that many would know him as their Savior—so that you would know him as your Savior.

Bad things happen. Bad things happen to good people, at least by our standards. The fact of the matter is that those things happen to sinful people in a sinful world. Jesus came so that those things would be the worst of our problems. He came so that we would have a home in heaven to look forward to, one without disease or suffering of any kind. And so Jesus meets us in any and every circumstance and calls us to something better. He calls us to look to his power. He calls us to imitate his prayer. He calls us to trust his preaching. And he promises that everything, even the bad things, he will use to accomplish good things for us—now and forever.

The Text: Mark 1:29–39 (NIV)

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.

³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.