

3 February 2019
The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Devil’s Devil”

Text: Luke 4:31-44; 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13; Jeremiah 1:4-10

I titled this sermon “The Devil’s Devil” for that is how Martin Luther once taught Christ - that He bedevils the one who bedevils us. That Jesus is the Law’s Law, death’s death, the devil’s devil. And that is what I tried to teach in this sermon, using the example of the blue lights of the policeman. Jesus has come to overcome all that tries to overcome us.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A number of years ago I was driving home from a Wednesday night Bible Study. It was probably 9 o’clock or so, and I was pretty tired from a long day. I just wanted to get home and go to bed. I was almost home as I approached one of the last couple of intersections that stood between me and my pillow, and the light turned yellow . . . At a moment like that, you have a split second to decide what to do. I could hit the brakes and wait through a light that would seem to take forever. Or, I could go just a *teensy bit* faster and try to make it through. So with visions of a soft pillow, a warm blanket, and blissful sleep, I chose the second option. And, of course, you know what happened. I probably wasn’t even all the way through the intersection when I saw the blue lights come on. I had to pull over. My bed would have to wait . . .

Well long before that evening, the blue lights went on in a city of Galilee, named Capernaum. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue one Sabbath, which as we heard last week also, was a common practice of His. But this particular Sabbath was different, as while Jesus was teaching, an unclean demon interrupted Him and cried out: ***Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.*** To this demon, the appearance of Jesus was like the light turning yellow. Before this, the light had been green. He possessed this man and was cruising right along, full speed ahead. But now things were different. Could it continue on, continue possessing this man, or would it be forced to stop?

Well, it didn’t take long for the answer to come. The blue lights came on. Jesus pulled the unclean demon over and told it: ***Be silent and come out of him!*** And just like me that night, the demon had to obey. His nice, cozy home in this man would be no more.

But it wasn’t just that. It was also the fever that had a hold on Simon’s mother-in-law. It was also many and various diseases that afflicted the sick who were brought to Him. It

was the sin and guilt that oppressed all in the other towns of that region, where Jesus went and preached the good news to them. Wherever He went, the blue lights came on, and the demons, the fevers, the diseases and sicknesses, the sin and guilt - all of it, was forced to stop. Here was one who had **authority** over them. And they had to obey.

And the people **were astonished**. Not at the presence of an authority figure - we all have those. People who have the authority to tell us what to do. The police, the government, judges; the principal and teachers at your school; your boss at work, your parents at home.

The people in Capernaum knew that, too. But this was something different than what they were used to. For that day, it wasn't them getting pulled over, it was the guy who blew past you on the Beltway doing crazy speeds, pulled over. It was the bully or cheater at school who got called down to the principal's office. It was the guy at work who always skates by and takes credit for other people's work that got the pink slip. This was a great day for them, for finally, here was the relief they needed. Here was one on *their* side! Here was the one with authority over what was possessing, oppressing, and afflicting them, and who was using that authority to help them, protect them, rescue them, and save them.

It was authority with love.

We're not used to thinking that those two things go together - authority and love. Maybe that's because for us, in a sinful world, they so often don't. Authority is used unfairly or for selfish reasons. It is used arbitrarily and not the same for all. It is exercised harshly. Or maybe to phrase it using Paul's words today: *If I have authority and have not love, I am just a pounding hammer. I gain nothing.*

But authority with love, that's something they were not used to. Yes, sometimes the blue lights went on for them - and us! - when the Law is preached and we are forced to pull over and repent - but even then it is in order to love, to forgive. So that they *wouldn't* be punished, so we *won't* be condemned. For that is, in fact, what Jesus had come to do. To save. And so the one with all authority, with authority the likes of which had never been seen before, uses that authority not over others, but over what is harassing us; what is hurting us. He *serves* those under His authority. He lays down His life for those under His authority. And so the people were astonished. And Paul said: That, that right there, is the **more excellent way**.

Because it is the way of God. The one who is love and loves perfectly. Who loves you perfectly. Even when you are unloveable. For frankly, none of us is . . . loveable. But as Paul said when he wrote to the Christians at Rome (5:8): *God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, - while we were still quite ugly, rebellious, out of order, and unloveable - Christ died for us.* And already that day in Capernaum, Jesus is showing

that love that will take Him to the cross.

And that's His love for you, here today, as well. His *authority* here for you. For whatever demons are oppressing you, whatever the skeletons in your closets or the monsters under your bed, He has come to turn on His blue lights and drive them out with His love. Whatever sins are weighing heavy on you, burdening you, and giving your conscience no rest, He has come to light them up and drive them out with His forgiveness. And whatever weakness and doubts are causing you worry and fear, those too, He has come to overcome with the good news that the kingdom of God is here for you. That you be captive to these things no more.

And so He has planted His cross firmly into your heart and life and marked you with it. Not to oppress you, but to save you. That His death and resurrection be your death and resurrection *to a new life*. So the enemy cannot have you. For you belong to Him. To the King. To your Saviour, who in love put His Name on you when you were baptized, and He isn't taking it back. That's His authority for you. **Authority with love.**

That changes things a bit, doesn't it? **Jesus blue lighting the things that are trying to blue light us!** Jesus' amazing, astonishing love, and that by laying down His life in death, He now has authority *over* life and death. An authority He will use on the Last Day, when He speaks not to demons, diseases, or sicknesses, but when the blue lights go on *for death and the grave*, and even they are forced to pull over and give you up in the resurrection, to live with Him forever.

We heard God give authority today to Jeremiah, to be His prophet, to speak for Him. He told Jeremiah that *I have put my words in your mouth*. And with those words, Jeremiah will *pluck up and break down kingdoms*. He will *destroy and overthrow*. He will *build and plant*. Jeremiah. How could Jeremiah do anything like that? Well, he couldn't. But the Word of God can. The Word of God that has authority. So Jeremiah would speak, and the blue lights would come on for kingdoms, nations, and kings.

And God gives that authority today, as pastors blue light sins, speaking in the stead and by the command of Jesus. His words, His authority, His forgiveness. As husbands lay down their lives for their wives, blue lighting fear and need with the love and care of Jesus. And all Christians - no matter how young or new to this you are, for as God told Jeremiah, *Do not say, 'I am only a youth'* - all Christians, as our Lord's priesthood of the baptized, blue light sin with forgiveness, strife with peace, hatred with love, falsehood with truth, sadness with joy, betrayal with faithfulness, loneliness with our presence, harshness with gentleness, and more. Whatever the need, whatever the trouble, Christ has authorized you to turn on the blue lights and drive it out with His love. And you do. I've seen you. It really is the more excellent way, is it not?

And then God said this to Jeremiah, too: *Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to*

deliver you. Words similar to those at the end of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus tells His disciples-now-apostles, followers-now-sent-ones: ***I am with you always.*** For living a life of love can be a bit frightening. Opening yourself up for others, laying down your life for them, in a world eager to take advantage of such people. And so sometimes we don't, and so need to repent of this, too.

But the Lord is with you. He has given you His Spirit. In fact, the Lord has ***touched your mouth***, too, as He did Jeremiah, and into your mouth has put His ***word*** - His Word made flesh! The once-crucified-but-now-risen Body and Blood. The same Body and Blood that blue lighted demons, diseases, and sin in Capernaum, to blue light whatever is oppressing you, to bless and keep and serve you, and to strengthen you to now do the same for others. To love.

I was lucky. The policeman who blue lighted me that night let me off without a ticket. Sin, death, and the devil will not get off so easy. Jesus has come to forgive your sins and give you life, which means that sin, death, and the devil must be abolished. And when the Lord comes again, they will be. And you'll get home. Not to a soft pillow, a warm blanket, and blissful sleep, but to the glory of the Lord and the presence of the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. And then, as Paul said, ***faith and hope*** will no longer be needed, for we will see what we now believe in and hope for. But ***the greatest of these, love***, will remain. For *God is love* (1 John 4:16). And we will abide with Him, and in His love, forever.

So Arise, shine, for your light has come (Isaiah 60:1)!
Today, a **blue** Epiphany light, for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.