

“What’s Happening?”
 Sermon for 4 December 2022
 Texts: Deut. 34:1-6; Genesis 26:17-25

There are seven reasons I cannot bring you the word that I had prepared this week. They are, not their actual names, Douglas, Meredith, Laura, Cynthia, Katie, Simone and Anna. It was a dark and stormy night. The driving was treacherous with torrential rains and violent gusts—flying debris flew horizontal across the glistening roads. I prayed to get to jail safely and the Lord delivered. I sensed that something was really up. I was on time. Sue although had already started. She was ministering to Douglas, an inmate just released. I listened in as I packed our things into the locker. Sue asked about his spiritual condition. He responded that he was a “devoted Christian.” You would have no idea that was the case from the things coming out of his mouth—things of darkness, karma, negative energy . . . helplessness, anger and despair. Now Sue and I are there as God’s servants. And one of the things that we are learning is that bringing the Scriptures to life entails applying them to real life situations—and this happens best when one is fully present in the moment . . . when one is observing with spiritual eyes those who are in the room. *The Lord calls upon the servants who are in the room when He wants to move, when He wants to accomplish ministry. **Our core identity as His servants is crucial to ministry.*** The ministry is constant, ongoing and God directs it all. Apparently, Sue thinks I have “a foot in the door” ministry. She says that I have a knack for creating an opening for the Spirit to enter in and change everything.

The game was on. I interrupted, “You claim to be a Christian so I am going to take you at your word. I am going to do that despite the fact that you are spewing new age, Eastern, occult gobbledygook. What’s your name? “Douglas.” Okay, Douglas, here’s the straight scoop. You say that she has taken everything. You say that you will never see your kids. You talk about negative energy and anger and your language is neither biblical, nor Christian. Douglas, you have a demon. Maybe several. But let’s deal just with the demon of anger . . . not negative energy, not karma. Karma does not even exist. But demons do.

Now Sue and I debrief after these sessions typically and when we talked over the deliverance ministry piece, we both noted that we talked without interruption to Douglas in a busy jail lobby. Yet it was as if we were in a sunlit room in secured space. The focus was totally on what was happening right then and there . . . with him and us. It was very quiet very peaceful throughout. And yet Devine registered some very dark and difficult things with us—murder, death and so on. We listened intently so as to know how to pray effectively.

So, in the name of Jesus, we are going to take authority over the demon of anger. This is called bringing a matter into the light. We are by faith going to bind it up and cast it out . . . we are going to throw it out the door and close the door behind it. You are going to rebuke, renounce and disavow the devil and his minions in the name of Jesus. And then you are going to pray the blood of Jesus over yourself, your loved ones, your family and we will be breaking *spirit ties* to the forces of darkness in your family’s past. They may have troubled your family in the past, but

that day is over. You have by the power in the Name evicted them this night. *So he did all he was told to do.* The demon vacated him and the premises. Thanks be to God. Douglas learned that there was a new sheriff in town! And Douglas experienced deliverance peace. And peace is the theme of this Advent Sunday is peace.

So my suspicion was proved right: something was up in the spirit realm. And I knew it in my bones. One reason that I knew it was anchored in the circumstances right in front of me. In addition, my copier had gone crazy earlier in the afternoon and in spite of my getting five copies of the message, I got seven. I typically take in only three, or four. But this night I would need seven. Six inmates and one for Sue. No one entered the lobby while all this was going on, no one else was there—except the officer in control. He heard and saw it all. It was amazing coming out of the blocks like that! I was full of excitement and anticipation over what might happen next, in jail church. Six women came to church—Sarah, who is getting out soon, brought two friends and we were joined by three others.

Sue has mentioned that I have a way of presenting things on a level that is often higher than the ladies' general understanding—but by anchoring it in life as they know it, they get it. Now I want to take you to the end of our church session—the application and prayer portion. We had witnessed life-changing ministry for over an hour, as one woman after another experienced victory over her circumstances. That's right, each participant heard, and internalized that the world doesn't happen to Christians—***Christians happen to the world!*** For instance, Isaac, in response to a famine, moved to Gerar, with his whole household (the thousands he had inherited from his father Abraham) and Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, never knew what hit him! Such is the impact that Christians have on the world! It is rather easy to reverse that and think the world determines everything. But the world cannot determine everything because the altering power of the gospel, of Christian faith, trumps all worldly powers.

Want some examples of that? Consider Genesis 26. There was a famine, Isaac got up and moved and that mitigated the adverse effects of the famine. He protected and preserved his household from starvation and destitution. He overcame the famine under the direction of God. **Then the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt—that would have resulted in captivity and bondage to worldliness because that is what Egypt stood for in those days. Egypt was emerging as a world power, but it was given to sensuality and false worship. The purity of God's family would be harmed by going there. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you.** (vv. 2-3) Now that was long ago and far away, so here is some more current Christian impact on spiritual tormenters.

The worldly notion of obtaining wealth through drug dealing came to church, but it went down in the flames of confession and repentance. In its place came a holy confidence that the God who promised to protect and provide for us would supply a godly means to achieving that provision. Next up, someone suffering from a dysfunctional inability to choose good friends, to know who is trustworthy and who is

not. She adopted an elder sister to oversee these relational matters until strength and discretion developed to render that help redundant.

Then there was a spirit of un-forgiveness which had bound up and was tormenting its carrier. That person actually straightened up, lost her ball and chain as the burden of payback was cast aside as the choice to forgive ushered in forgiveness and release. Do you see? These are powers and principalities being overthrown by the power of the word; the gospel was taking captive those who had been captured. The world doesn't happen to Christians, Christians happen to the world.

We dealt with a love of the flesh following, and a way of escape was supplied: death. Die to yourself to become yourself, die to your flesh to have victory over your flesh. Becoming a Christian doesn't extinguish who God created you to be. No, faith actualizes the best in you so that both what is good and what is better disappear in the rear view mirror. If you really want to be your true self, run to Jesus; he will restore your full humanity. He will empower you to do it, mastering your flesh on the way to excellence. It is better, much less bruising and painful. Let your suffering come through persecution don't let it be self-inflicted. The battle belongs to the Lord; choose him to be your leader. Do you see how the kingdom is advancing with power in each of these cases?!

The shift that came with the next woman was most striking. She has chosen to follow Christ, to learn more of God and she decided that because of what she is learning, she will not go back, not ever go back to what she was before. She will let go and move into the future with Jesus; she trusts that he knows where they are going. Yes, faith is the most powerful, life-changing thing in the world. How are you happening to the world? How are you overcoming the famines, the distresses and troubling? Have you taken up the mantle of service?

Do you now see yourself as a servant among servants serving the living God? Blessed are those who understand that they are called to serve, and not to be served. And blessed are those whose hands are not slack. Blessed are those who exclaim, "Lord, what shall I do? What more can I do? Lord, glorify yourself in me and through me!"

The Philistines never knew what hit them, but they felt it . . . they recognized that God was with Isaac, God was blessing Isaac. That is why, initially, they told him to get out of town. Then they saw how God prospered Isaac—a hundred-fold increase of harvest?! That's divine success. Success is godliness, self-control, love, joy and patience. When those around you see this fruit in your life, they will come to you and sue for peace. They will come to study you and, to receive their call, and enter the kingdom work. *The world doesn't happen to Christians, Christians happen to the world.* The dumpster parked outside your heart will be full of cast off things, trash and garbage—things like sin, pride, greed, ambition, guilt, shame, anger, fear, lust and selfishness.

The last tormenting spirit to show up was sorrow. Sadness over a failing Dad, cancer stricken and yearning to overcome her own predicament, this woman wanted to get it together so as to be there with him, to minister to him, to comfort and care for him. Clearly God's will for her and him. The failure to act upon the spiritual knowledge she had, carelessness, or laziness had landed her in incarceration. Hope and repentance joined forces to knock that one out of the park. The six women came together as a team! They carried each other's burdens; they left determined to love, serve and lift each other up. Such should ever be the parting sentiments of true worship. Full of grace and grateful to God . . . may we all prove to be Isaac's in the Promised Land.

So initially I had wanted to preach on overcoming disqualification *because I had made this amazing discovery—something I have read before but never paid attention to—I learned that Moses, after his death, was allowed to enter the Promised Land and that he participated in yet another theophany/God encounter/or appearance also after his natural death!* Moses had disqualified himself through disobedience and therefore God forbade him entrance into the Promised Land in his physical, natural body. He died and was buried in an unmarked grave by the Lord himself. How sad. What a disappointment to see the Promised Land but not to be able to enter in.

But, as it turns out, Moses was not barred forever from the Promised Land. He is sighted on Mount Tabor conversing with Elijah and Jesus as the three witnesses, Peter, James and John, testified. Fully alive and really in the Promised Land! How gracious and kind of God! What a token of forgiveness! What a sign of glorification! What confidence, peace and consolation proceed from this truth.

By this revelation, we know something of our future life, our eternal life, in heaven. We know it is characterized by personal cognizance. We know, by this testimony, that our identities and personalities remain, they do not perish with our dust. We know the future that we have by faith! And that consolation is a source of peace. No matter what happens to the body, we have a future and a hope. Someday we will meet Isaac, and Moses, and Elijah and we will know them by face and name . . . we will not confuse them with anyone else! And we will all be together with Jesus. Then we shall know and we are known, then all the promises will be kept. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but we shall not—change will not bring our elimination, or extinction but only blessing and life. Christians happen to the world, the world doesn't happen to Christians. **Take courage, I have overcome the world.**

Glory and not annihilation, perfected existence and not futility and chaos.

Amen.