

From our text we get the distinct impression that Capernaum is a dark city. Demons seem to be in abundance, as well as diseases of every kind. And these evils do not merely exist here alongside the people. They seek the people of the city to possess them. We meet a man in the synagogue here who is possessed by a demon. Later on, we hear that many others have demons. We hear of Simon's mother-in-law who is possessed by a high fever. And others, too, are in the grip of disease. Capernaum is not hell, but as the saying goes: "you can see it from here." It seems to be a place where demons, disease, and death congregate.

Hear what St. Matthew says about Capernaum. The people there " *dwell in darkness,*" he writes; " *in the region and shadow of death.*" Sounds foreboding, doesn't it? Who would want to live in Capernaum?

How about Jesus? More than any other place on the map, Capernaum becomes a home of sorts for Jesus. He spends much of His time there. Now here's a question for you. Does Jesus come to Capernaum because there is so much evil there, or does the evil come to Capernaum because Jesus is there? Perhaps our answer should be "both."

Matthew tells us that the people in Capernaum " *have seen a great light;*" that " *on them a light has dawned.*" This light is Jesus. And with Jesus coming to the city, light breaks into the darkness there. Jesus rebukes the demons to silence and casts them out of the people. He heals the people of their diseases, including the fever in Simon's mother-in-law.

Picture a dark night. And then watch as the sun begins to rise in the east. The shadows flee. What was covered in thick darkness is now ablaze with the light of the sun. This is Capernaum. As Jesus comes to the city preaching and teaching, healing and casting out demons, it is like the sun rising and filling the place with light.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Except that at the end of our text Jesus leaves Capernaum. " *I must preach (elsewhere),*" He tells the people. What happens at the end of the day when the sun goes down in the west? It becomes dark. Night settles in. When the light does away, the darkness gains control.

Does it ever seem to you that your life is a little like Capernaum? More dark than light. Struggling with the evils of disease, and death, and what have you. Not possessed by demons, but harassed by them.

It's not a bad thing to feel this way because Jesus does come to Capernaum because of the evil there. And so also, in your baptism, He came to you because of what you were. " *You were darkness,*" writes the Apostle, " *but now you are light in the Lord.*" As Jesus broke into the darkness of Capernaum, so also, He broke into your darkness. You were in the possession of the evil one. You, too, lived in the shadow of death. But not anymore. The light has dawned also for you. Jesus came to you just as He came to Capernaum. He took possession of you. He made you His own. He gave His life for you on the cross, and in your baptism, He gives His life to you.

You're not in heaven, not yet. But as the saying goes: "You can see it from here," because here in your baptism, you are with Christ and in Christ.

Yes, Jesus does come to Capernaum because of the evil that is there. But it is also true that where Jesus goes, evil will come. The evil one hounded Jesus, seeking to destroy Him. He got his chance at the cross. But in bruising Jesus' heel there on the cross, Satan's head was crushed by His death and resurrection. The victory over evil belongs to your Lord. And so, it belongs to you.

But how can we live as victors over evil when evil is so close at hand? The darkness took over in Capernaum when Jesus left the city. Won't the darkness also take control of us in the same way?

When the light of the sun goes away, darkness can, and does, take over. And indeed, the evil one and all his demons always seek us who belong to Jesus. They seek to take you and me into their darkness.

And isn't it true that we often give them a helping hand in this? Our sinful flesh gravitates to what is dark. We give lust, greed, and selfishness every opportunity. And at the same time, we turn off the light, keeping our Bible mostly closed, always finding excuses to avoid the light here on Sunday mornings.

My friends, this is not good. And we must repent of this wickedness. Since we are children of the light, we must put to death the deeds of darkness.

How is this done? Every day we return to our baptism. There is the light for you. For you, the sun never goes down in the west. Jesus never leaves you because you are, and remain, baptized into His death and resurrection. He does allow you to be harassed by evils. But these evils can never possess you. You are already possessed by Jesus.

And you are forgiven. He entered into your darkness on the cross. There He shed His blood for you. There is no sin in your past that is not covered by Jesus' blood. There is no dark corner in your life that is unknown to Him. He knows it, for He endured all of your darkness, and all of it He forgives.

The Bible does seem to indicate, as Luther likes to put it, that heaven will be one eternal day. As you stand in God's grace, baptized and forgiven, you can see that day from here. For you who are in Christ, the light never goes away. Amen.