

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 4B
January 31, 2021
Mark 1:21-28
He Taught with Authority

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. 22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. . . . 27 And [having cast out the unclean spirit] they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." (Mark 1:21-22, 27 ESV)

Dearly Beloved,

For the early Israelites there was no greater authority than Moses. After all, he's the one God had sent to lead them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and to the brink of the Promised Land. He's the one who would meet with God and bring His Word back to the people. In today's Old Testament reading we heard that the LORD said to Moses, "...I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." (Deut. 18:17-18). Indeed, God is THE authority and the One He sends speaks with His authority.

And while the prophets of old did speak God's Word to His people, in today's Gospel we see that Jesus is truly that One of whom Moses spoke. He is, after all, born of Mary, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. God did put His words in His mouth and Jesus spoke all that His Father commanded Him. So it's no wonder that the people were amazed and astounded when they heard Him. He did speak with authority. His words had power.

Now, the people who heard Jesus in the synagogue that Sabbath day had never heard anyone like Him before. There was something about what He said and the way He said it. He seemed to know from first-hand experience what He was talking about. It was so unlike what they heard from the scribes who merely piled up authority on authority as they quoted rabbi after rabbi to give their teaching authority. But there was a hollow ring to their teaching. For their teachings were, in fact, the teachings of men. And while these may have a certain limited value and wisdom among men, they are but a tiny spark compared to the glistening sun when held next to the Word of God.

But Jesus' teaching was different. He didn't quote the old teachers. He didn't appeal to the words of other men. He didn't engage in making subtle intellectual distinctions. Rather He preached the same message He always preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). That's the message He had been sent

to proclaim. And He did it in both word and deed. In fact, He gave the Gospel its content and power.

And it's no wonder He taught with authority for such was inherent in His nature. Being true God He possessed divine authority and is the source of all earthly authority. But as a man, His authority was often hidden, so we hear Jesus say, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Yes, authority is a gift. No one, except God Himself, has authority unless it is given to him. The government has authority over its citizens. Employers have authority over their employees. Parents have authority over their children. Teachers have authority over their students. Yet, all such authority is a gift of God's grace and is to be used for the benefit of those under authority.

So when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, His teaching had authority. For Jesus is the only man who ever lived that could speak about the kingdom of God from first-hand experience. For He had left His throne in heaven to become one of us. He hid His glory to suffer temptation and trials. He became man to suffer the attacks of Satan and to defeat him. And that's just what He did. He resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness. And He was about to defeat one of Satan's henchmen. All this He did for us, to bring about our repentance and our salvation.

Now there was a man in the synagogue that day who was possessed by an unclean spirit. The demon had so taken over that this man had no control over himself. The devil really did make him do it. And when the demon heard Jesus, he knew he was in trouble. For he really did know who Jesus was, and it terrified him. He cried out "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!" Indeed, the demon did know who Jesus was and that He was the Holy One of God. And as such, the demon wanted nothing to do with Jesus. He knew Jesus had authority over him and could destroy him with a word.

So Jesus commanded the demon, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" Jesus didn't have to resort to another authority. He didn't resort to power. He didn't have to chant a spell or resort to magic or anything else. He didn't even have to fast and pray, though He often did. His Word, with its own authority, was sufficient to exorcize the demon from the man. For Jesus had come to save all people from the power of the devil. So Jesus exercises His authority. He muzzles the demon and orders him to leave the man.

And the spirit obeyed. He had no choice. For Jesus, as the holder of all authority, had commanded him. His Word accomplished what it said and freed the man from being a slave of the devil. But the demon didn't leave willingly or peacefully. He didn't leave without one last temper tantrum. He shrieked and threw the man into convulsions. It's like he grunted and slammed the door on the way out. He went away kicking and screaming. But He did go away.

And when the people saw what had happened, they were amazed, astonished, and astounded. They had never seen anything like this. By a mere Word, Jesus had released a man from his bondage to a demon. So it's no wonder that Jesus' "fame spread throughout all the region

around Galilee.” News like this travels fast. Having seen and heard someone with such authority, the people couldn't keep it to themselves.

And His Word continues to amaze today. For it is amazing that Jesus really did die for the sins of everyone – including our enemies and those who persecute us, those who wish or do us harm intentionally or unintentionally, and even the worst child-molester and murderer and terrorist. And while we don't think we're that bad, we need to realize that we are, and confess that Jesus died for us too.

And yet, we are amazed when we hear the voice of Christ and find that He has cast the demons out of us too. At our baptism, when, in the water, we were buried with Him, the unclean spirit which so controlled our lives, was cast out as our sins were forgiven through the water and the Word. And His Word continues to have authority and continues to do what it says. It forgives us, cleanses us, comforts us, and saves us. It gives us everlasting life.

Yes, Jesus' Word has authority over the demons which possess and molest you. What are those? Gossip, drugs, alcohol, worry, entertainment, sports, a desire for power and control? It's anything that pulls you away from Jesus and His Word, keeps you from His House, or leads you to trust in or give priority to anyone or anything but Jesus.

So as God's chosen and holy people who He has set free from the demons which would possess us, we don't want to give the devil any room in our hearts and lives. By the grace and power of God we renounce and resist the devil and all his works and all his ways. For Jesus Christ has destroyed Satan's power. By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has freed us from Satan's grasp. Satan no longer has mastery over us. And yet we still sin don't we? We still think, say, and do what is evil in God's sight.

Yet, by the grace of God, through the gift of His Son, we have forgiveness for all those sins. And we, too, hear amazing words. When a pastor pronounces absolution, he doesn't do it on his own authority. Rather, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, he stands before you in the place of Jesus, as His representative, and forgives you all your sins. The words he speaks are not his own. They are the words of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, forgiving your sins. His Words have authority and do what they say.

Yes, Jesus taught and acted with authority as He freed the man from His bondage to the devil. And as amazing as that was, He continues to teach and act with authority today. He continues to guard and protect us from Satan's schemes so that we can live with Him forever. And as I proclaim that good news to you today, I do so on the best authority, Jesus Christ Himself. In His name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener