

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 4C
January 30, 2022
Luke 4:31-44

His Word Possessed Authority

And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, 32 and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority. (Luke 4:31-32 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

We live in an age that is rather anti-authoritarian. Fewer and fewer people are considered true authorities. People in positions of authority have acted in ways that lead many to question their authority or distrust what they say. Who are the authorities? The police, the government, health officials, bosses, parents, teachers, principals, and, in some cases, even pastors. We often don't know who we can trust. We certainly don't want anyone telling us "no" or correcting or rebuking us. We often hold those to be true authorities only if we agree with them, or they with us, and tell us what we want to hear. Too often, we reject authority - unless it's our own.

Yet, when Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, the people who heard Him "were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority." So, what was it about Jesus' teaching that astonished them? For one thing, Jesus didn't quote other rabbis, as other teachers did. He didn't use big words or theatrical devices. He didn't say, "I think," or "I feel," or "In my opinion." Rather, He often said, "But I say unto you..." He taught as one sent from God, who came from the Father full of grace and truth. He taught with full confidence: He knew what he was talking about, and people could sense that. Jesus taught with authority and His words did what they said.

Indeed, the Words of Jesus require us to recognize, believe, and accept that there is Someone Who has every right, every freedom, and every justification for speaking to us whatever He desires to speak. "His Word possessed authority." Therefore, we must listen. We must take His Word to heart, even if He should send someone else to do His speaking for Him. For His Word is our life.

You see, we each receive benefits precisely because the Word of our Lord "possessed authority." The people of Capernaum were astonished at His teaching (v. 32), saying to one another, "What is this Word? With authority and power He commands the unclean spirits" (v. 36). Today's Gospel even illustrates the powerful authority of Jesus' Words by recording for us the conversation He had with a demon: The demon shrieked at Jesus, "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.” What the demon said was true, but Jesus did not want or need his witness. So, He rebukes the demon, “Shut up and go away.” And the demon did, but not before throwing the man down. Jesus’ words do what they say. The man was freed from the power of the unclean spirit.

Indeed, Jesus speaks with authority because He is God. He speaks with authority because He was sent from the heavenly Father to do the divine work of delivering God’s Word to the nations. He said it Himself in the last chapter of Matthew: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28:18). The Scriptures also say of Jesus, “He will not cry aloud or lift up His voice” (Isaiah 42:3). Our Lord did not need to get loud. When He speaks in common, everyday language—using His indoor voice—power and authority pour forth from Him. As it leaves His lips, the powerful authority of His Word comes to you and to me and to the entire creation and even to the unclean spirits who hate God. “What is this Word?” the people of Capernaum marveled, “With authority and power He commands the unclean spirits.”

Yes, Jesus demonstrated His authority over the unclean spirit merely by speaking. Yet, He did the same with Peter’s mother-in-law. St. Luke tells us Jesus rebuked the fever which oppressed her and it left her. By the authority of His Word, even a fever must obey. And Peter’s mother-in-law arose to serve Jesus and His disciples. Her healing was complete because Jesus said so.

And then, once the Sabbath was over, people brought sick people to Jesus and “He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.” Even His touch had authority, in this case over various diseases. And among those brought to Him, some had demons. You see, oftentimes, illness was actually a result of having an unclean spirit, or demon possession. But when the demons would cry, “You are the Son of God!”, Jesus “rebuked them and would not allow them to speak.” Yes, Jesus has authority over demons and disease.

And Jesus still speaks with authority, and we receive benefits. Things happen here in our worship that is directly comparable to today’s Gospel. Here in our worship, the Words of Jesus can be heard in their full authority and power. Granted, you and I do not get to see our Lord’s lips move while He speaks. We must content ourselves to hearing God speak through someone who has been sent. But the divine Word we hear in our worship and the divine Word that was heard in Capernaum is one and the same Word. That means we no longer have reason to fear any enemy—not even a violent demon or a disease.

And what does Jesus say to you today? “I forgive you all your sins.” “Take, eat, this is my body given for you. Take drink, this in my blood shed for you.” “Go in peace.” Thus, you too are freed from your demons, from your unclean spirit, from your fever. For the One speaking those words has authority over all that would hold you in bondage and captivity. And what Jesus says, is, and what He gives, you have. Thus, Jesus’ Word frees you from bondage to the devil, and sin, and death, and gives you peace.

That’s why we don’t need anything wildly spectacular or exciting in order to get something out of worship. After all, a spiritual brawl is already taking place in our midst, and every time God’s

Word is preached and heard, the bondage of sin is broken, the demons all get chased away, and even death gets the boot. Samson killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 16:15), but our Lord Jesus accomplishes even more, simply by speaking. "His Word possessed authority."

And that Word is continually at work upon us. "What is this Word?" the people of Capernaum marveled, "With authority and power He commands the unclean spirits" and this Word has now come near to you. "The Word is in your mouth and in your heart" (Romans 10:8). When the divine Word comes to your heart, it creates and renews your faith. When the divine Word enters into your mouth, it speaks forth thanks and praise.

After all, the One whose Word has authority is the One Who has set you free from the power of the devil. In your baptism, Satan was cast out and you were cleansed to be a child of God. By Jesus death and resurrection, you are freed from your sins. They can no longer damn you since Jesus has suffered that damnation for you. And because the Alpha and the Omega has taken all your griefs on Himself, you need not fear Delta, Omicron, or any other disease or affliction of the body or mind. Oh, yes, you may still get sick, you may suffer affliction, you may even die, but Christ has authority over it all, and in Him you will live, disease-free, forever.

Beloved, our Lord Jesus continues to preach His Word to you. And that Word still has authority. It calls you to repentance. It calls you to faith in Him. It forgives your sins. It frees you from the devil. It heals you in body and soul. So, as Jesus' Word comes to you in and with the bread and wine, you eat and drink His very Body and Blood because He says so. And where Jesus' Word is, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. As His Word continually comes to you, you will be amazed at the grace it showers upon you. Rejoice and be glad, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener