

Epiphany 4 Year B:
Mark 1:21-28
January 28, 2018
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Authority Issues

“They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Authority is something we encounter every day. Sometimes it is our own authority, but most often it is the authority of another who has been set over us. This could be a teacher, a police officer, or a manager at work.

Most of the time we fear authority because of its power to harm or penalize us. Who wants to stay after school or rewrite a paper? Who wants to get a ticket for a traffic violation? Or who wants to be put on probation at work or demoted, or worse yet, fired or let go? We live in fear of what authority can do to us and how authority can change our lives.

Now there are those who exercise authority justly, with compassion and fairness. And there are those who exercise it without any apparent feeling, unjustly and not in a fair manner: in short those who use authority well to good ends, and those who use it poorly to suite their own ends, needs and motives.

We all are aware of authority, good and bad, well used and poorly used and wasted. It is almost intuitive on our part, this sensing about authority, because it speaks to the whole person exercising it. If the person is badly flawed, then it is not likely, we suppose, that that authority can be used properly and well. But authority, when we give it to someone, must be earned through experience with that person exercising it over us. It is not simply a given, coming from title they are granted, trust me!

Authority that is insecure, self-focused, not empathetic, ego-pride centric, and disrespectful of others under it, is flawed and dysfunctional, and can only succeed through the gross misuse of power to push that authority on others and make them obey it.

I am thinking here of history's worst dictators and tyrants, and not just in the political sphere, because we can find them in the workplace, the family, in school and yes, even in the church.

However, authority that is secure, other-focused, humble, spiritually motivated, empathetic, just and fair, and respectful of those over whom it is exercised is not only functional and likely quite successful, but also is respected by those under it. Most of all authority that is well exercised comes from a person who is authentic in their role of authority and in their personal life.

From whence does authority come?

In my experience... [And I have had both secular and religious experience as one with authority, and also secular and religious experience as one under authority] ...In my experience authority must always be earned over time, and not assumed or granted with a title such as “Father” or “Rector,” “teacher” or “priest.”

No, Authority comes from the experience of you by those who are subject to your “authority”. Does he know what he is talking about? Is there any evidence that he practices what he preaches? Does he even try to live the Christian life? What wisdom does this person offer us? Is he or she faithful? Will they be there for you when you need them? Is his or her leadership self-serving or self aggrandizing? Is he or she looking for praise and accolades from others or from me?

It takes time and experience in real life; in real time to earn your authority if you have some, and by the same token it will take the same time and experience to yield authority to those who are over you.

But make no mistake, no unquestioned authority will ever be yielded to an authoritarian misusing their power or position over you for their own purposes, even though we may have no choice but to obey that authority or are forced to resist it.

Authority must be earned, like trust, through time and experience with that authority. Real authority is not a given coming with some fancy title or position, but rather, grows from the authenticity of the person exercising it.

From whence does authority come? My authority comes from God, not myself. God works with me when I am working for God and walking with God in my doings, comings and goings, writings and teachings. When I wander off, God leaves me to my own desires to make my own errors and mistakes of vision and judgment.

From whence does the authority of Jesus come?

“They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.”

Taken as a whole, the authority of Jesus comes from his teachings, his actions, how he conducted his life, and it comes from his death, the manner of his death; and finally the Resurrection. Without these things, Jesus would be a mere obscure footnote in history, his teachings would likely be forgotten and certainly not taken seriously.

But we are here this morning, 2000 years later aren't we? Countless Christians have also given their lives to testify to the authority of Jesus.

But from whence comes the authority of God? Certainly, it does not come by the mere title “God.” Rather it comes from the 10,000-year history of human experience with God, enshrined in the sacred scriptures. And that alone is not enough. A book could gather dust on the shelf. The authority of God comes from our own experience of God, and by this we know and grant God

the authority God has in each of our lives. Disobey it when we realize it, we do so at our own peril. Obey it and you will find happiness and synchronicity in your life.

AMEN