



Pastor Gwen's Message
Authority over Power
Sunday January 31, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

How many of you can still name a teacher you had in high school? I know that I can. Two of them in fact. One was Mr. DeRosier, the band director. I was so enamored with how he directed the band, I wanted for a long time to be a music teacher. He would raise his hands and the band members snapped to attention and on his cue began playing. I was so excited to see how much he loved what he was doing; I wanted to do it too. After a year of study with him, I was selected as the High School band drum majorette. I got to direct the band when we were on the field doing maneuvers at half time of each home football game. It was a feeling like no other to also direct the playing of the national anthem before the game as well.

The other teacher I respected most was Miss Oliver. She was a short, elderly lady with curly, curly hair. Her area of teaching was American Government. Boy, did I like her and the subject. She obviously saw my interest and loved to give me special things to do in class. She made learning fun for me and I learned a lot. Today I still rely on that information and think fondly about Ms Oliver, when I listen to the news of what is going on in our government's capital.

When I think of these teachers and others I have had, I can see the impact that they had on my life. Not that I became a music teacher or a politician, but they

both made me a better person. They got me excited about learning and showed me I could do whatever I wanted to do. By the way, I have directed our long lost choir here in the past, so a bit of nostalgia comes my way once in awhile.

I think it is true that teachers are underpaid for what they do and the affect they have on young people. They spend long hours in school and deal with too many kids that don't want to be there and learn. Most won't ever be famous, yet it is amazing, the power they have and have had over students.

And with that being said, I have also experienced some really bad teachers. When I was on the school board in Erin, we had a teacher at the top of the salary schedule that was a bust. My children would come home with stories about her weekly. She would not embrace technology and was rude to children that did not behave. She may have taught for 35 years, but she was really teaching the same year 35 times. But she too had power over the kids and I suspect mostly the wrong way. She changed and wounded young lives but not for the better.

Today in our Gospel we go back in time to this world of powerful teachers. We are early in the Gospel of Mark and Jesus is coming into his own as a teacher. In fact Mark has no birth narrative, no childhood stories of Jesus. He begins with John setting the stage for the baptism of Jesus and then jumps right into Jesus' ministry. And right, you guessed it; Mark goes right into Jesus' teaching. And the key here is to note, that Jesus began teaching with authority.

Mark never tells us what Jesus is teaching, but he makes a big deal about Jesus teaching with authority. The context does not seem to be highlighted, but rather it is the person of Jesus that is important. Jesus taught differently than the Scribes. After all, Jesus is the Holy One of God. With Jesus, it too was the power of His person that makes people listen.

The other teachers before Jesus were the scribes. Jesus was different. People perceived Him as not only having but teaching with authority. Jesus has something that the scribes do not. That is Jesus has the ability to heal. Also part of our text for today, Jesus heals a man that had an unclean spirit. In fact Jesus ordered the spirit out of the man and he heeds the request. So in a way,

Jesus' teaching and healing are intertwined. No doubt that Jesus is different than the scribes. Jesus is different.

If we look at the words "power" and "authority" we see that today we often use these words interchangeably. However, I think that there is some distinction that should be made between the two. In Jesus' day the Scribes and Pharisees had the power. They were the ones to interpret the law. They made the rules that kept people on the right side of the Law of Moses. Their power was innate in the job that they were given. And probably because of how they yielded their power they did not have the support of the everyday person. You could say that they did not have authority over the way people thought about them. An example of what I mean between power and authority can be seen in the Apartheid government of South Africa. The Government had the power for years, but a man in jail named Nelson Mandela, had the authority.

You see, the scribes thought the law gave them the right of have power over the people. There was no room for grace where they lived. So in effect, they were lousy teachers because they held power in society but the people feared them. But Jesus was different; his authority came from outside of society, outside of himself. His authority was a sense of call.

Do you remember when we talked about a calling, the last few weeks? Good teachers have a call to teach. They are using their God given talents. And they put their talents to good use for the right reasons. They do not teach for money or prestige. They teach because they are called, because it is who God made them to be. They have teaching authority over others because they use their God given talents.

I think we can discern that to have power does not necessarily come hand in hand with authority. Just look at our Wisconsin government. The state has the power to advise a mask mandate, but does it have the authority to do so? A question many are wrestling with today in this country. Should the government have the power to control what goes into our bodies, or does the authority stop before that. Don't want to get tangled up medical verses political rhetoric this morning, but I do think it will show us the difference between power and authority.

Now on the other hand, having authority does not mean that you have the power to do something. Think with me about who had the power to hang our Lord and Savior on the cross. It was those with power, the scribes and

Pharisees that lead to the crucifixion. That was power. Authority is different in that it is persuasive. And does not need to depend on violence, but rather it speaks to the heart.

So Jesus is different from the scribes because Jesus was teaching with authority. And Jesus' authority comes from above, His Father in heaven. Even the demon in our story feels that authority from God, when he says, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Verse 24 It is Jesus' divine authority that makes Him a target of that power. For the powerful are afraid to lose their power. They feel threatened and afraid because they already know that Jesus' divine authority will ultimately trump all of their worldly powers.

And if we continue to read Mark's Gospel and other New Testament Scripture, we will hear stories where Jesus not only tames demons but overcomes evil in the world around Him. This ability to overcome the Devil is found only in divine authority.

For us today, Jesus is the only way we too can overcome evil in our daily living. We cannot just wish evil to go away, we need help from a higher entity. We need help from God, the same God who sent his only son to earth, to let us have a glimpse of his authority and to succumb to the power of the government on the cross. His death and resurrection give us promises of divine proportion; forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. So not only do we struggle with the forces of the world, power and the authoritative gifts of God, but we struggle with good and bad inside of us. How do we do what we want to do? This is a question posed by Paul in Romans. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Chapter 7 verse 15.

A good story to remember is the one about the Native American chief instructing some braves about the struggle within. "It is like two dogs fighting inside of us," the chief told them. "There is one good dog who wants to do the right and the other dog wants to do the wrong. Sometimes the good dog seems

stronger and is winning the fight. But sometimes the bad dog is stronger and wrong is winning the fight.”

And a young brave asks, “Who is going to win in the end?”

The Chief answers, “The one you feed!”

Well, the good dog is fed with what comes through authority from God. It is filled with hope and grace. Good ingredients to fight off the power of evil. We need our Lord and Savior to help us fend off the evil present in our souls and in the world today. Jesus has the authority to overcome the power of the devil. If we ask, he will call the evil out of all of us, forgive us and transform us for abundant life all while giving us the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven.

So it is no wonder you are here this morning to give praise and thanksgiving to The Holy One of God for all He does for us. It is here that we are strengthened by His Word and at the Eucharist table to go out and give authority to His promises. We are transformed by that authority to give light to the world around us. What power we have to proclaim with authority, the Good News of Jesus Christ. **AMEN**