

## Sermon Fourth Sunday after Epiphany 2018

January 28, 2018

Mark 1:21-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words, **“he taught them as one who had authority.”**

I know I’ve said this before, but our day is a day where we don’t get authority. We don’t understand it properly. We think that authority is something to always be strived for, and we think this because we think that it equates to power. By that I mean, we think that the best place to be in a company is the CEO. The best place to be in a country is the president. The best place to be in a church is a pastor.

Along with this, we also demean what those authorities know and do. As a part of this, we assume for ourselves a greater knowledge than someone who has studied something. For example, in our day it’s very common to assume that one knows more than their doctor because they’ve read a few articles from Web MD. Or that we know better how police a town because we aren’t racist unlike those who abuse their power. Or in an example that shows the whole problem, I was listening to the radio this week and they were talking about the sentencing of Larry Nassar, the doctor for the US gymnastics team. And of course, there is an individual who abused his authority to the worst degree. But it was interesting that as they were talking about this issue, then a person called in and described how his daughter had been treated inappropriately by a colleague at work. So, this dad and his friends—or brothers, I don’t remember for sure—took this colleague on a drive and told him that if he didn’t shape up they had a hole in the ground that would be his home. Of course this made for interesting radio. It was totally awkward for the hosts, and sort of humorous to hear how they tried to navigate the call—which they did well to their credit, making the point that there are those who should be notified in such cases in order for things to proceed appropriately. But this whole thing just encapsulates the problem of authority since the Fall, doesn’t it?

There’s the problem of this man who wants to take justice and authority in his own hands—something I can certainly appreciate as a father, but have to correct as a Christian and pastor. And there’s the problem of a man who abuses the authority he has been given. This is just such a mess isn’t it?

But in our reading today is our Lord Jesus. Now, as I speak about authority, it sort of seems like there's a disconnect between what I'm saying and what we see in the reading, doesn't it? After all, I've been talking about how we don't get authority right, and the reading talks about how Jesus spoke with authority that others couldn't speak with. And we have to recognize that. If we don't we're putting something on the text that isn't there, and that's not what we do when we read the Bible. So how does this connect?

It connects, because we see in Jesus and in His authority, what authority is properly. What do I mean? Well, to start with what the people say there, what Mark tells us, he says, **“they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”** He's saying the people watched Jesus and they couldn't believe how He could teach. They couldn't believe how Jesus could address the words of Scripture in a way that the Scribes couldn't. And of course, we see glimpses of this throughout His ministry. Think about the authority that Jesus demonstrates when He preaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember what He says so often? He says, “You have heard it said of old, but I say to you...” In other words, “You've heard that Rabbis say to you x, y, and z, you've heard them say, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ You've heard them say, ‘whoever murders is liable to judgment.’ You've heard them quote the command to say, ‘don't commit adultery,’ but I say to you something with greater authority. I say to you, ‘whoever lusts has already committed adultery in his heart.’ ‘Whoever is angry is liable to hell.’ ‘Don't return evil with evil, but turn the other cheek.’” Jesus says these things and we see His authority. We see that He is God in the very flesh—which if you caught it, that's why this reading is here in this season. We're reading this now because it's Epiphany and in Epiphany we look at Jesus as God in the flesh, the manifestation of God with us. And that's what this teaching does. It shows that authority.

Or look at when Jesus heals the paralytic. Look at the authority there. Do you remember that? There's the man who's paralyzed and his friends want Jesus to heal him, but they can't get to Jesus in the house, so they lower the paralytic through the roof? Do you remember that? And do you remember what Jesus says to the man? He says, “that you would know that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins, I say, ‘Your sins are forgiven, pick up your mat and walk.’” There's that authority. The proper authority given by God.

And then there's the authority that the people marvel at in the reading. The authority where Jesus speaks and the demon listens to Him. Just like God showed His authority by speaking in the beginning of time, by saying, "Let there be light," and creating light, Jesus speaks now and that word does, it performs, what it says, and the demon leaves the man. This is that authority.

But so what? So what that Jesus has this authority? So what, when we see the corruption of that authority around us all the time? What's it to us? What does this mean?

Well, when we see that Jesus has this authority, when we see what He CAN do with it, it shows us all the more what authority really is when we see what He HAS done with it. Think about it. Here is this God in the flesh, this God with us, this man who has all of the authority to forgive sins and to cast out demons, and what does He do with it?

Or to provoke thought for a minute, to make the point, what would most of us do with it? If we had the authority over all things like this, what would we do? The best of us, I'm sure would try to use it only for good. We would try to help others with it, we would try to serve in that authority to benefit our neighbor, to aid the poor, to heal the sick, to shelter the homeless. But then here and there we would probably just use it for our own advantage. You know for really important things like calling the remote to ourselves when we don't want to get up from the couch. Of course, that's not important, but we would probably start with little things like that, that seem inconsequential, but it would grow. Pretty soon it would be to pay this bill just to get by. Then it would be get a better house for ourselves. Then it would be to have better meals, and so forth and so on, until it would become totally self-serving, and we are living in a palace as a king.

Of course, that's not exactly how this works, but hopefully you get my point, my point that in our sin, this is exactly what we do with authority, we use it as power to serve ourselves. But what did Jesus do with it? He came, as He said, "**not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.**" Jesus showed us what this authority was for because He used it to love us. He used it to give up all of His power, the power by which He could have had legions of angels protecting Him, the power by which He could have spoken a word and created a massive Kingdom for Himself with all of its comforts here on earth. He could have used it for that, but He didn't. What did He do? He used it to give it all up for your sins. To die on the cross

for you. To die that He could be raised again proving that You have been cleansed in His blood, buried in Him in Your baptism, fed and nourished at His table; the authority of His Word doing what it says.

So there we see the proper authority. And we see what authority is for, it's not for our own self-service, but for the service of our neighbor. This authority goes for government, for the home, for the school, and for the church. It applies to kings and presidents, to legislators, to police officers, to husbands, to parents, to teachers, and yes to pastors. All of us in authority have a duty to others. And in Jesus, we also have a blessed example of what authority looks like. We also have the flipside of this. Just as Jesus was under the authority of His heavenly Father we see how one should live under the authority of another. And what a glorious blessing this is!

But as Christians, this also has a meaning we can't ignore. This authority of Jesus as God in the flesh includes something else we shouldn't overlook. It's that same meaning that connects to what the people marveled at. It's that since Jesus does have this authority to teach and speak God's Word properly, we should hear how that Word applies to us.

It means that, under His authority, we should properly submit ourselves to the humility of hearing how Jesus calls us to lives that are free from the sins that beset us. It means that when you hear Jesus telling you, "You have heard it said of old, but I say to you...." You should apply that law to yourself. You should hear that command and know that it is a call for you to drown out even the sinful desires you have. Sinful desires for selfishness, selfish gain, selfish anger, lust and greed. And most of all that you should quench your desire for self-righteousness, because you should hear just how serious your sin is, how you in sin are like that man in the synagogue oppressed by that demon. You should hear that, because then you can also hear that Word which sets you free. You can hear that Word, "Your sins are forgiven. Your sins have been crucified with me. Your sins are buried in my tomb, and now you can get up off of your mat and walk."

This, Christians, is the proper order of authority. We might get it wrong as the broken sinners we are. But Jesus didn't with his authority. And He used that and still uses that, that you would be brought into new life in His Kingdom. Thanks be to God. Amen.