

As one with authority

Today's lesson from the gospel of Mark comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was in the synagogue, teaching. Suddenly, there was a man with an unclean spirit, and the spirit yelled out to Jesus, "What do you want with us? I know who you are, you are the Holy One of God." Jesus rebuked the spirit, commanding him to come out of the man. The spirit leaves and the man is healed. Everyone was amazed by Jesus' powerful words and deeds. "What is this?" they ask one another. "This is something new – someone who speaks and acts with authority." And from that moment on, his fame began to spread around the whole region.

Mark describes that Jesus was someone with authority. When he taught, people were astounded, because he taught, not like scribes and other teachers, he taught with authority. Jesus also cast out demons and brought healing to others. People listened to his words, and they saw what he did and how he lived, and they recognized the authority he had. There was something about him that gave his teachings and his actions power and life.

Later in Mark's gospel, there is the story of Jesus calling his twelve disciples, and after they had been with him for a while, after they learned from him and followed him, he sent them out two by two. Jesus gave them authority to do the same ministry that they had seen him do: to teach, and heal, and cast out demons. And they went from place to place, and they taught, and cast out demons, and healed many who were sick.

As Christians, we are disciples of Christ in our own day. We seek to follow the words and example of Jesus, and to respond to the call that he gives to each of us. How do

we do that? What authority do you and I have to speak and act the way Jesus did? How can we respond the way the first disciples did in our own story?

In Mark's gospel, the word translated in English as "authority" is the Greek word "exousia." This Greek word can be translated ability, power, or freedom. "Ex" means out of, and "ousia" means being. So, literally, authority, exousia, means ability and power that comes out of one's own being. When people describe Jesus as having authority; this power and freedom to teach and act as he did came out of his very being. This was his authority. Right from him. People observed that Jesus did not teach like the scribes. The scribes had the right to teach because they were educated in the law and the Torah. Jesus had authority from within him; truth and power and freedom from God came out from him.

A little more word study: our English word "authority" comes from the Latin word "auctor" that means to increase, or to promote. It is where we get the English words "author" and "authentic." One who has authority has the ability to increase and bring forth life in others. People with authority will "author" life and light in others. This is what Jesus did. He spoke and acted out of God's love for everyone, especially the poor and the pushed aside. He shared meals and fellowship with them. He welcomed and loved them. Jesus brought forth life that he saw in others. That is what people saw in Jesus. His love and his authority came from within; it was authentic, and others recognized that. The scribes and other teachers in Jesus' time were scholars. They knew the Torah; they could recite the scriptures and the commandments; they could quote other scholars and teachers. Jesus *knew* God. He *lived* love. His very being increased and brought forth life and love in others.

We know when someone has that kind of authority, when they increase and stir up and author life within us. And we can tell when someone doesn't have that. You would never take seriously a swimming teacher who had read lots of books about swimming but had never actually been in the water. You would not sign up for skiing lessons with a person who had studied the great skiers and their techniques but had never spent time putting on skis and making their way down the mountain. Or, when you are going through a difficult time – whether it is grief, or loss, or recovery with addiction, or a serious illness, you can usually discern when the person you are talking with really understands what you are going through. They have authority to speak with you about it because they have lived it and have learned something from going through it.

So it is in the spiritual life. A person can read lots of books, and attend workshops, and watch videos, and read some more. They may be able to quote lots of writers who are experts on the subject. That may be helpful, but only up to a point. The scribes were like that. So are lots of Christians today, including some clergy. But when a someone *knows* it, they not only talk the talk but are faithfully trying to walk the walk. And when you encounter someone who understands, you recognize that here is someone authentic, here is someone with authority. There something inside of you connects with what is inside of them. There is truth there, and power. In the spiritual life, this is where real learning happens, and real healing, and understanding, and growth.

You and I have been given authority to be the instruments of God's grace. The power comes from God, as it did for Jesus, and the disciples. It comes from living a life connected with God. It comes from being a person of prayer and compassion. What kind of Christian are you? The world can discern between the scribes, those who say they are religious, and can talk about God, and those who know God, and walk with

God, and live their life following Jesus. The apostle Paul writes that mere “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” We have all seen teachers, and clergy, who do a good job being puffed up, but they lack the love for others that builds up.

Do you give yourself to author life in others. Do we allow the Spirit of God to move and act in us and through us in our daily lives. moving and breathing within us, and within our daily lives. We have been given authority by virtue of being disciples. Our truest, authentic nature is to be who God created to be, and to nurture and author that in others. We are called to offer healing and hope to others, and to share the Good News of God’s love in our words and deeds. When we do that, we show Jesus to others. We become the body of Christ, the hands and heart of Jesus in this world. May God bless us. Amen.

Trace Browning

Year B – 4th Sunday after the Epiphany

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 • Psalm 111 • 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 • Mark 1:21-28

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