

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, you know that we are surrounded by many dangers and that we often stumble and fall. Strengthen us in body and mind, and bring us safely through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news. Alleluia. (Luke 4:18a cf. NIV84)

Sermon Text:

What comes to mind when I say the word “authority”? I would venture any number of civil servants come to mind when we hear the term. Perhaps it’s federal, state, or local. Ultimately, you likely envision someone who holds power over you in some way.

Today, in our lesson, the word “authority” comes up not once but twice. Jesus teaches with an authority that is noted by those who gather and listen. In between the two utterances of the word, we also have a display of the authority that Jesus wields. So today, we encounter authority. Not authority of a local, civil, or even federal nature but one which is altogether divine. Because it is, it is absolute.

²¹ *They (that is Jesus and his motley band of misfit disciples) went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.* ²² *The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.* A three-part sermon could be preached just on these words alone in our lesson. Jesus and the disciples went to Capernaum, a bit of a hub of operations for Jesus it would seem. While there what does He do? He goes to church. The Son of God who knows all, and is all, and who if anyone were ever to make a case for not going would have had the most ironclad argument of them all, goes anyway. After all, He had said it was good. His Father had said it was good, even as He enshrouded it in the Third Commandment. Jesus always perfect, never failing.

And as is pretty usual for Jesus, once there He is invited to teach. Volumes of ink are spilled here too. We want to run to the exorcism because that is what impresses us in this text these words just seem to establish setting. Ah, but they are so much more than that. Jesus will after all leave the disciples with the marching orders of the church, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:18-20). Teaching it is how God works among His people. The Word in all of its power and grace. Paul will boast of its strength and not his own, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16).

Of course, this is no mere flawed and faltering tongue. As Jesus speaks, as He teaches and preaches the Word Who has become flesh (John 1) opens its mouth. Divinity gives dictation. God speaks and the people take notice.

Text: Mark 1:21-28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” ²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (NIV84).

Over the years, as a preacher and teacher myself, I have wondered, “how Jesus did it”. What about His teaching and preaching made it so authoritative, so powerful, so poignant? I’d be lying if I didn’t admit that more than anything I wanted to know so that I could copy it. But it all misses the point doesn’t it? I will never be able to teach and preach like Jesus because I am not those things. When I open my mouth, though God may grace this miserable wretch with the privilege of speaking His Word, if I perform my calling correctly, it will always be His it will never be mine. In the synagogue on that particular Saturday, the Word was spoken by none other than God Himself. Absolute authority audibly announced His will. How could it not have been authoritative?

Ah, but then when something so pure and so perfect is presented to humanity, satan cannot be silent. Luther once said that wherever God builds a church, satan builds a little chapel. ²³ *Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,* ²⁴ *“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”* ²⁵ *“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”* ²⁶ *The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.* ²⁷ *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”* ²⁸ *News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*

What a silly question our demented demon hurls at Jesus. They know who He is. Why He has come. He wants nothing to do with them. Of course, He has come to lay waste to them. While they, in their folly, would seek to war against Him this too is as futile as was satan’s attempt to take God’s throne in heaven. Note now how easily Jesus dispatches them. *Be quiet ... Come out of him!* Ah, it’s the Word again. The Word of Christ carries the authority of God. Its commands must be heeded. Oh, our demon throws a temper tantrum and shrieks aloud even as it shakes the poor wretch whom it occupies but it must let him go. When Christ has spoken even the most powerful of God’s created beings must listen.

It’s an utterly fascinating slice of history. No doubt we could contemplate it for hours but I won’t dive into every pool today. Instead, a pointed question. How does this particular lesson apply to you, to me?

We live in a world where authority is often despised and rejected. We know that there are endless ways around authority, just ask the person unhappy with their service at the local cell phone store. How long does it take to demand the next level of authority when we do not get our way? Even when presented with absolute authority in the pages of God’s Word, what is the typical reaction? To take it seriously, as it really is, or to pretend that we are the authority over it picking and choosing the parts we like ... dismissing the parts we don’t. It’s downright demonic.

But while we may not be demon-possessed, the One who silences them, the One who holds absolute authority spoke with that authority on the cross. It is finished was the final cry announcing the defeat of satan, the forgiveness of sin, victory even over death. Ah, and when Jesus speaks, well ... even the demons must listen. Oh, they throw their temper tantrums in the world around us for that matter our own sinful flesh and sin-filled world often join in but they will not win. They cannot win. For all my sin, for all the times I despise authority, even God’s in it. Jesus opens His mouth and speaks. He whispers in His Word. He preaches through His called workers. He teaches in our homes around dinner tables as moms and dads talk to their children and perhaps even lead them in devotions and prayer and News about Him spreads wherever His people go.

Authority ... what comes to mind? The flash of the lights on a police car? The wrap of the gavel from a Judge? The military might of a nation armed to the teeth and ready for war? An unassuming man, born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit ... the Word made flesh for us ... a voice in a synagogue ... a bloodied frame upon a cross. Dear friends, that’s what Absolute Authority looks like. **ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY ABSOLUTELY FOR YOU! Amen!!**