

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – 2024
Mark 1:21-28

“By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority? Jesus was being challenged. It was Holy Week. The Messianic King had entered into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna,” shouts of “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” shouts of praise identifying Jesus as the Son of David. It wasn’t long before Jesus turned over the money-changers tables in the Temple courts. Travelers didn’t bring animals to sacrifice. Devout Jews, honest believers were being exploited. Jesus saw it and was angered; yes, angered. Travelers had to have their money exchanged into the local currency to pay the temple tax, which required Jewish coins without human images. The on-site bankers charged an exorbitant fee. Jesus turned over their tables. “He said to them, ‘It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers’” (Matthew 21:13). Exploited; honest people were being exploited and Christ takes action.

It created a stir. The status-quo-loving religious rulers didn’t like itinerant rabbis upsetting their apple carts. “By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” (Matthew 21:23). All in all, it’s a good question. Jesus so clearly had authority; unlike them, unlike the faithless hired hands, unlike those who peddled God’s Word for personal gain. When Jesus healed the paralytic, the crowd was thunderstruck. They recognized God’s authority when they saw it. They marveled and delighted to see it and then hung on every word that came from Jesus’ mouth. Jesus taught at one who had authority. Christ’s words gripped their soul. His teaching was lucid, dripping with clarity, truth, applicability, insight, and most of all, entirely congruent with the Scriptures. His teaching illuminated the Scriptures, made the Scripture come alive! Grace, Divine Love, God’s forgiveness, God’s holiness, a life of purpose and meaning – Jesus taught it all. “And they were astonished at his teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).

In the book of Ezekiel, God speaks as One who is angered by those who serve in His name and yet make a practice of exploiting the faithful. “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them” (Ezekiel 34:4). Shepherds not doing their job puts the sheep at risk. Shepherds who disdain God’s Word and adopt their own religious viewpoints are a disgrace to Christ and His church. God is determined that His sheep not be exploited, not be neglected or twisted by what is false, twisted by what is evil. “For thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out’” (Ezekiel 34:11). “I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land” (Ezekiel 34:14). “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:23).

That’s why Christ was sent; to shepherd us, to defend us, to live and die and rise again and give us the Kingdom of heaven; that’s why the Son of the Most High was sent. God Himself had come to establish His reign and rule and gather His sheep and feed us with all that is holy, to share His life, to use His authority and draw us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). A demon possessed man was in darkness. An evil spirit had exploited the man. Christ saw

it and spoke a definitive word: “Be silent, and come out of him!” (Mark 1:25). You know what authority is, right? God speaks and the heavens are created – that is authority. God breathes into man the breath of life and man becomes a living being – that is authority. Jesus healed the paralytic, gave sight to the blind, cured the leprous, walked on water, changed water into wine and raised Jairus’ dead 12-year-old daughter – that is authority. The people saw it. The believer saw God’s authority in Jesus and rejoiced. “God has visited His people” (Luke 7:16). Of course, they rejoiced!

Do you know what this church and every other just like it is supposed to be? Do you know what this body of believers and every other Christian institution on the face of planet, do you know what we are all supposed to do? We are to bow to the authority of Christ. Completely, without hesitation, with joy and confidence and humility and unwavering devotion we are to bow to the authority of Christ. People are being exploited and Christ’s church is the light of the world. The media misleads the vulnerable. Government is promoting twisted critical theory. Higher education is a ship adrift. People are being exploited. Christ’s church is the answer. Christ’s Word is the answer. The Lord of glory breaks the darkness. Jesus Christ liberates those in darkness (John 1:5). He vanquishes darkness because He is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Cast out; Jesus cast out the unclean spirit. The unclean spirit resisted the reign and rule of Christ and it was cast out of the man whom he was exploiting. Jesus has the authority. On one occasion, Jesus was confronted by His coming crucifixion. He saw, he knew the road that lay before Him. Jesus felt the coming storm, the pain, the depth of sacrifice, the loneliness and the merciless enemies of sin and Satan. He also saw the product of His sacrifice, the victorious end. He said this: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:31-32). The crucified Son of God crushed the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). The crucified Son of God made a public spectacle of the devil and his horde (Colossians 2:15). The crucified Son of God is the Light that no darkness can overcome. Satan cannot exploit us. Christ’s blood has washed us and delivered us and refashioned us. God’s Word sets us free. The body and blood of Christ in our mouths sets us free. Death itself sets us free. The resurrection of our Easter King is our eternal freedom.

When you find someone, anyone, who uses their authority for the common good, then you have found someone who knows Jesus. That is a sweet thing. Search out those kinds of people. Be that kind of person. We are to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). Christ is the good tree that produces good fruit (Matthew 7:17). You are that good fruit. Whatever your station in life, you have the privilege, the responsibility, the joy to contribute to the common good, to look to the interests of others. Here’s the quintessential statement that Jesus made in that regard. “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18). Jesus uses His authority for you, for your benefit, to strengthen you, to bless you, to sustain you and to bring you home to heaven. His authority is in you. His life is in you. His victory over sin and death is in you. Christ’s reign and rule is all around us. He has used His authority to forgive you, to defeat your enemies, and give you hope and a future. There is no other authority here than that which belongs to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. That makes us profoundly blessed.