

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Mark 1:21-28

Date: January 28, 2024

Liturgical Date: Epiphany 4B

Title: One with authority

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

As one who has authority. Jesus has authority, both in his teaching and in his commanding the unclean spirits. Jesus has authority from the Lord God, as Moses promises that the Lord God would raise up a prophet like him. Jesus has authority in his teaching as he astonishes hearers in the synagogue whose scribes taught the laws of God and men. Jesus has authority over unclean spirits and they obey him.

The people saw the visual representation of God's authority at Horeb on the day of the assembly. The children of Israel were assembled around Mt. Sinai after being brought out of Egypt. God's authority was evident and obvious. God had done the great saving work to bring his people out of Egypt. The command to Pharaoh - let my people go. The plagues. The passover. Passing through the Red Sea. Now at Mt. Sinai, God's authority is shown.

Mt. Sinai was full of lightnings and thunders. The mountain was covered with a thick cloud. The loud trumpet blasted. The mountain was wrapped in smoke. The Lord descended on the mountain with fire. The sound of the trumpet was louder and louder. Moses spoke. The Lord answered in thunder. And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." The rest of the commandments followed. God's law thundered down the mountain. And it was terrifying.

The Lord spoke with authority. The words of the Lord demanded obedience, written in stone tablets, carried down the mountain by Moses. The people were afraid and trembled, thunderstruck by the glory and greatness of the Lord. "Moses, you speak to us and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us, lest we die." The people did not want to die. They wanted to live. The Lord concurred. They are right in what they have spoken.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you - like Moses - from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. The Lord would send a prophet to speak the word of the Lord. The Lord would raise up this prophet and give to the prophet divine authority. Whatever the prophet would speak would have the authority of the Lord. Those words would carry the same weight and bear the same power as if the Lord himself had spoken the words.

The Lord spoke the word from the mountain - the law. Moses brought the law down from the mountain. But this new prophet will not be a second Moses, with a second law that demands obedience. This new prophet will be like Moses. He too will have authority from the

Lord. But his words will not be the same words that Moses brought down the mountain.

The Lord did raise up a prophet like Moses. That prophet is our Lord Jesus. Our Lord does not reveal his authority with lightnings and thunders, with smoke and fire. Our Lord begins his prophetic work with a proclamation. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” This proclamation is not fearful like Mount Sinai. At Sinai, men fear and tremble at the sight. But with Jesus, he calls men to him - Simon, Andrew, James, John - and immediately they leave everything and follow Jesus.

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. On the sabbath, the day set aside for rest and to hear the word of the Lord and to gather together, the prophet speaks. And the people who hear him are completely astonished, not by what they see, but by what they hear.

The regular sabbath teaching was by the scribes. They would have taught as men under authority. The law dictated how the scribes could teach. God’s law from Sinai is recorded throughout the second half of the book of Exodus and throughout Leviticus and into Numbers as the cloud lifted from the tabernacle and Israel departed from Sinai. Deuteronomy also has a recounting of the laws given at Sinai. The scribes were experts in this law, ready to apply God’s law to any situation.

The scribes were under the law’s authority. The scribes taught under that authority. Sometimes the scribes taught God’s laws, but sometimes they would teach other laws, made by men. The commandments of men. Sometimes these man-made rules were just to keep life orderly in the community. Other man-made rules were taught as carrying the weight of God’s law. The scribes’ expertise in the law led them to think highly of themselves. They found the best seats for themselves. They taught others how to live, even if they didn’t always live by their own teachings.

But their teachings were always under the authority of the law. They could debate even the most nitpicky of points or their own self-importance. Those who heard the scribes might have learned something about God’s law or were brow-beaten into following man-made traditions or were left scratching their heads over what would be the point of all of these rules.

In that same synagogue, Jesus begins to teach. He speaks as one with authority. Jesus has come into the synagogue to continue his proclamation. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Here is the good news from God. God is coming near to his people - not with lightnings and thunders and fires. God is coming near to his people as the reigning king. God has not come to drive people away in fear, but to bring them under his good and gracious rule, to live in an eternal kingdom.

The time that is happening is now, teaches Jesus. The debates about the in’s and out’s of the law - especially of man’s laws and rules - are of no use. The law does not bring a person closer to God. The law is intimidating because it shows sin, as a mirror. The law brings knowledge of sin. The law is deadly because it demands a reckoning. The wages of sin is death. Therefore repent of your sins, and believe in the gospel. This gospel, this forgiveness, this

removing from you the punishment that your sins deserve is the good news for you. “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.” Thus says the Lord.

The forgiveness of sins is such a comforting teaching from Jesus that you must take it to heart. God approaches you to bring you salvation. Flee away from teachings that are not from God. Flee from teachings that are man-made or that direct you to find comfort in following all of the dotted-i’s and crossed-t’s of laws and rules. Such teachings and ideas will not bring any consolation. On the other hand, how comforting are these words which we say every week, “I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” Seek the Lord’s teaching, his word, his forgiveness, his salvation.

And they are astonished and dumbstruck. You mean that God is speaking to us, and we will not die? You mean the voice of the Lord that we trembled at is now calling us into his kingdom? You mean that the Lord that we saw in the consuming fire is now sending out his good news to drag us to him, to dwell with him forever? They are dumbstruck. What can they say now that they have heard the teacher whose mouth is full of the word from the Lord?

The hearers listen intently to all that Jesus teaches, devouring every word as if they were a morsel from heaven. How much more excellent are the words from Jesus’ lips than the teaching of the scribes. How sad for hearers to only eat at the table of the scribes’ teaching. Such hearers would be famished and left hungering for eternal life. But hearing from Jesus, he speaks words of forgiveness, of making things new, of God dwelling with us and we with him. Jesus speaks as only God could speak. So different from the scribes, and with authority from the Lord.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” Jesus teaches with authority. And now a man with an unclean spirit comes into the synagogue. Jesus’ words have drawn the attention of more than the ears of the synagogue attendees. An unclean spirit knows who Jesus is. The unclean spirit sees the man Jesus speaking with authority from God. The unclean spirit knows that this man Jesus is God.

And what would Jesus have to do with the unclean spirit? The unclean spirit knows what Jesus has been proclaiming. The kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus teaches men to bring them into the kingdom of God. But this unclean spirit has already cast his lot in opposition to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God comes into this world advancing and taking ground, now that Jesus is here. And there is no room for any other kingdom that opposes Jesus. Eventually any other kingdom will be driven out.

The unclean spirit realizes this. Have you come to destroy us? The kingdom of God is not static. The kingdom of God advances through proclamation of the gospel, through teaching the word of the Lord, through baptism, by the work of the Holy Spirit. We have already read all of these many ways that the kingdom of God is coming near in only 28 verses of Mark’s gospel

so far.

The time is fulfilled to make known that the kingdom of God is near. This unclean spirit knows his time is short. If there were any who were unconvinced that Jesus is teaching with divine authority, the unclean spirit identifies Jesus before them all. The Holy One of God. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove at his baptism. The unclean spirit recognizes that Jesus bears the Holy Spirit. And the unclean cannot stand among the holy.

Be silent and come out. Jesus does not acknowledge or concur with the unclean spirit's testimony, however true it might be. Jesus' authority relies on the word that he speaks, the word that the Lord has put in his mouth. Whether teaching or commanding, Jesus' word has authority. Jesus is the prophet like Moses. Moses commanded the Pharaoh, "Let my people go." The Lord was taking back his people from Pharaoh. After plagues and the passover, Pharaoh did as Moses said. He let the people go. God saved his people with a mighty arm.

Now the prophet like Moses commands the unclean spirit to "Be silent, and come out of him!" Jesus comes to take back his people from the spiritual forces that oppose the kingdom of God. But this time - unlike with Pharaoh - there is no delay between the command and the completion of the same. The kingdom of God is here, with Jesus, as the time is fulfilled. The unclean spirit came out of the man. The kingdom of God grows. The word of Jesus amazes the crowd.

The kingdom of God draws near to you to repel and turn back the unclean spirits that desire to attack you or torment you. Unclean spirits could drive you to lust or coveting or shame or despair. Other unclean spirits operate on mankind as a whole, promoting ideas and actions that are violent or perverted or destructive of human life. There is a spiritual warfare going on all around you. You can perceive the effects of this war, whether or not you want to acknowledge the spiritual battles. Only our Lord Jesus and his word can overturn the works of these unclean spirits and free you from their kingdom.

The people at the synagogue witnessed Jesus' authority with their own eyes. They all talk amongst themselves. What is this? He teaches with authority. He commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him. A great epiphany to the people in the synagogue. So the people can't shut up about it. They have to report all over Galilee. A new teaching. Unclean spirits overthrown. Jesus is doing these things. Jesus has authority from the Lord to teach and command.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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