
Date : 28 January 2018

Series : Jesus' Authority" (Ephiphany 4)

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Readings : Lesson Deut 18.15-20 / Rev 12.1-5a Psalm 111 Gospel Mark 1:21-28

Good morning, I'm so glad to be seeing you all again today; I can't say what a joy it is to know that we are stuck with each other for the foreseeable future. It's a sense of belonging and of home-ness that my family and I are relishing and enjoying. Now I've had a rather unusual week, because our container arrived on Wednesday, with all our earthly goods – about a week earlier than anticipated, which is nice, but has pushed a few timelines a bit. So I've spent this week largely in my elbow-grease clothes: painting, fixing garage doors, or unpacking boxes. And there is a marvellous quality to manual labour – at least I find this – that as my hands work, it leaves my mind free to explore other things, and so I have spent a lot of time in working-prayer, and contemplating the various things that I have learned about this parish in the ten days that I've been here, and letting my mind wander over these things together with the Holy Spirit. And, of course, also returning to the texts set for today over and over.

In today's Gospel passage, we see three expressions of Jesus' authority, which map onto three sources of Jesus' authority. Of course, they are all part and parcel of Jesus' personhood, but they are aspects that are worth talking about separately.

- 1) Jesus' internal life. This is the security that Jesus has in Himself and in the Father's anointing on His life through the Holy Spirit. This is the first and most important source of His authority. Authority understood in this way is able to speak from the heart, without being threatened or entering into meaningless arguments with those who don't wish to listen. Authority that comes from within isn't undermined by someone else shouting louder – because authority that comes from security in His hearing the Father's voice through the Holy Spirit, that authority is not easily shaken. Therefore, Jesus' authority is not defined by how others respond to Him, or how other relate to His teaching. One of the ways that Jesus would have baffled his audience, is by speaking plainly "this is God's will; this is what the Scriptures teach in this passage; this is how we tell what is sin and what is godly." This was totally alien in the Synagogues – because the teaching of the day was entirely based on knowing the great Rabbis who had gone before, and interpreting their interpretations of the Scripture. Of course, when you are interpreting the interpreters, you can end up with very different results, and that is, to be very brief, how the Jews ended up with two major, opposing, schools of thought about the Jewish faith: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But Jesus doesn't shape His teaching in the expected way – when He teaches from Scripture he says: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". It is an authority they have not experienced before. And the people in the Synagogue are saying: "he teaches as one having authority, and not as the scribes". That is, he is not referring to anyone else to back up his claims. What He hears from the Father, is enough. Jesus thinks, speaks and acts in perfect integrity – there is no mismatch between what He says, thinks and does. That is the first expression of Jesus' authority.



- 2) The second expression of Jesus' authority in this text comes from the unlikely mouth of someone possessed by an evil spirit: a spirit that tries, in vain, to gain some influence over Jesus by seeing the calling on His life: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." This is the second source and expression of Jesus' authority: He knows that He is called, chosen, set apart from before His birth. From before the beginning of time, His life was hidden in the heart of the Father, and that is His identity. Jesus is completely, unshakeably, secure in the Father's love and that He is perfectly and wonderfully made in the Father's image. He is the Holy One of God. There is nothing that can threaten Him.

- 3) From His identity comes a mission. Jesus has a mission – and the mission is Jesus' third source and expression of His authority. This is one of the texts that Jesus expounds during his preaching tour of Galilee: Today he is in Capernaum and we don't know what he taught in Capernaum other than it was broadly (as per verse 15): "The time has come, ... The kingdom of God has come near ... repent and believe the Good news". We have, however, the sermon synopsis from his teaching in Nazareth preserved in Luke 4: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." This is Jesus' mission. That mission comes with the resources to carry out the mission – that is how God works. He calls and He equips. There is no frustration in God's mission: We always, always have what we need to do what we are called to do – even when we are called to do that which is way beyond our ability, or even impossible. Because with God all things are possible, and God does NEVER ask us to do something, without giving us the full resourcing that we need to complete His mission. In this reading, Jesus encounters a man, deeply troubled by an evil spirit, and immediately proceeds to carry out His mission: He has come to set the captives free, and He immediately sets the man free from the evil spirit. He has the authority needed to complete the mission entrusted to Him. Let me take a parallel; do you remember the Centurion, who comes to Jesus and says 'my son is seriously ill'. When Jesus hears it, he says "I will come with you" but the Centurion says no, only say the word and my son will be healed: as the Centurion explains: "I myself am a man under authority and I have men under my authority. When I say to one, go, he goes, and when I say to another come, he comes". Jesus hears the Centurion, and calls him "a man of great faith". Why is this great faith? It is because when we understand the calling that God has placed on our lives, and trust that God has given us EVERYTHING WE NEED to complete the calling, then we can act in the authority that is ours. If you have been called to be a mother, a wife, a husband, a father, a teacher, a policeman, a healer of hearts, a healer of bodies – you have been given what you need for the task. You rarely, if even ever have it in yourself alone, but together with those whom God is placing around you, you have it.

I am personally particularly grateful for this fact, because God's calling is the sole reason that I can trust that I am fit to be the Rector of this parish: I cannot put my trust in my training, my knowledge of theology, my experience or any other of a number of good and useful things that I am bringing; which are well and good to have and to bring, but my CONFIDENCE, lies exclusively in my trust that God has placed me here, in this place,



at this time, with absolute precision, timing and divine wisdom – and that while I am bringing everything that I have in me, I am also bringing everything that is in Him – and that is infinitely more.

Jesus calls the Centurion a model of faith, because the Centurion trusts that Jesus has the authority of the Father to complete the mission assigned to Him. The Centurion is right. Jesus had the authority of the Father to complete the mission assigned to Him. And so do you. The presence of the Holy Spirit within you is the evidence of this fact.

You see, an absolutely central tenet of the Christian faith is this: Jesus is the model and example of a perfectly lived human life. You'll hear me say this enough times in the years to come so as to get bored of it – and that's fine, then I've done a good job, but today, let me just say in a nutshell: Jesus didn't come to show us what it is to be God, he came to show us what it is to be human. Now, in so doing, he revealed to us the Father, and showed us that the most defining mark of God is to become choose the path of humility and descent, that is, becoming human – but that's a subject to unpack another day. Suffice to say today that Jesus came to show us what it is to be fully human, indeed Paul even calls Him 'the second Adam'.

Since Jesus came to show us what it is to be human, then what we see in Jesus' life, are all things we may experience in our lives. That means that these three areas of authority can be brought to fruit in our lives also, by the Holy Spirit. Let's revisit the three areas of authority that Jesus displays in this passage:

- 1) The authority of the Holy Spirit in our lives: hearing His voice and living, speaking and acting in perfect unity with what the Holy Spirit is doing within us.
- 2) The authority of Jesus' identity as the Father's anointed: called, made holy, set apart for God's purposes.
- 3) The authority of knowing your mission, and knowing that you are equipped for the task, just like Jesus was.

But, how do we move from wherever we are in how we understand our authority, to where Jesus is, in terms of His authority?

I suggest that these are three areas, which need to move in tandem, for us to be exercising any authority with godly integrity: hearing the Father's voice and speaking, thinking and acting consistently with what we hear; indwelling our identity as God's beloved, chosen, holy ones for Jesus' sake and walking into our mission, whatever the season of mission we are in right now, whether a very active one or a more hidden time of mission depending on our stage in life – but in all of these there is but one place to start, also one that we receive from Jesus: Prayer. Jesus teaches his disciples elsewhere that our authority, even when duly given and commissioned, is brought into our own lives through time spent in prayer.

So on that note, let us pray. We'll start out here, together, and please continue the work of prayer at home, opening your hearts to God and speaking plainly, as to a trusted friend.

Amen