

His Word Possessed Authority

Luke 4:31-44

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

February 3, 2013 – Fourth Sunday After Epiphany



Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. In today's Gospel, as in last week's Gospel, we again catch a glimpse of what the public ministry of Jesus was like. We follow Him on what might have been a fairly typical day – a very busy day, to be sure. We see Him engaged in various ministry activities: teaching, exorcising, healing, and preaching. And the common denominator running through all these activities is that "His Word possessed authority" – in His teaching, casting out demons, healing of the sick, and preaching. So let's see how that authoritative Word of Jesus showed forth in each of these activities – and then what that means for us today.

The first thing mentioned is Jesus' teaching: "He was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at His teaching, for His Word possessed authority." In His ministry, Jesus came as a Teacher – a Rabbi of sorts. He taught in the synagogues, the mountainside, the seashore, and in the Temple. He taught on the meaning and application of Torah, the Law of Moses, and also on the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. But so did the scribes and Pharisees, the other teachers of Israel. What was so different about Jesus that people would be astonished at His teaching? How did it differ from the rabbis? It possessed authority.

Now the rabbis loved to quote each other: "Rabbi Shammai said thus-and-so." "Rabbi Hillel said this-and-such." But Jesus didn't need to quote any other rabbis, for He spoke on His own authority. He taught as the One sent from God, who had come from the Father full of grace and truth. He taught with full confidence: He knew what He was talking about, and the people could sense it, as well. The rabbis dealt with trivial matters of the Law, and worse, would add their own man-made commandments: like how to tithe mint and cumin, or how many steps one could legally take on a Sabbath. But they neglected the weightier matters like mercy and faithfulness. Jesus, on the other hand, cut right through the minutiae and got down

to the heart of the matter: love for God and love for neighbor. He refused to rationalize the breaking of God's commandments. He told them a murderous and adulterous heart can be seen even in thought and word, if not in outward deeds. Rather than excusing divorce with a certificate, Jesus called people back to the beginning and God's intent and institution of marriage.

"His Word possessed authority" also in another area we probably don't think about too much: in His exorcising, that is, when He cast out demons. In the synagogue that day there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "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." Notice that the demon knows who Jesus is. But that knowledge doesn't engender faith but fear, so he asks: "Have you come to destroy us?" It's like what James says about mere intellectual-knowledge and pseudo-faith: "Do you believe there is one God?" he asks, "Good! The demons believe and tremble." Well, that's the case with this demon, too. But Jesus rebukes him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" He wants His apostles, preachers and people to have the honor of proclaiming His identity to the world, not a bunch of evil demons.

Jesus exercises this Divine authority not just to show who's boss, but also to show that He desires to use His authority to help and aid people. He has compassion on us, just as He has compassion on this demonized man. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but Jesus comes that we might have life, abundant life. When Jesus casts out demons, it's in anticipation of the decisive victory He would win over the devil on the cross. There He would defeat the old evil foe by taking away the trump card he held over our heads – our sin, which He took away by placing all of it onto himself. So, the devil no longer has anything left with which to accuse us! With sin taken away, death loses its power.

And when the people saw all these things they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this Word? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" Christ issues forth His command, and the demons have no choice but to flee, for the devil is no match for our great Champion. "One little Word can fell him." The third way we see Jesus' Word possessing authority is when He was healing the sick. This was another way Jesus used His authority to help people in need – such as when Simon Peter's mother-in-law was ill and bedridden with a high fever. When Jesus saw her condition He came and stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her, then immediately she rose and began to serve them.

Imagine, Jesus rebukes not only demons, but also a fever. And just as the demons had to leave, so also this fever had to leave, for Jesus' Word carries authority and accomplishes what it says. What a powerful voice, and a merciful one to boot! Jesus cares for the well-being of His people, including the needs of their bodies. So when the sun was setting, all those who were sick with various diseases were brought to Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them and they were healed. But you might say: "Are there not many others with high fevers and various diseases – also God's people – who aren't healed?" Indeed. Simon's mother-in-law would grow old, get sick again, and one time not recover. It's the same with all those who were healed. But these healings demonstrate that sickness and death are not the end, that the mission Christ came to accomplish will result in ultimate healing on the Last Day for our mortal bodies.

The final way in which Jesus' Word possessed authority was in His preaching. To be sure, He had no choice but to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God, for He had been sent for this very purpose. So, Jesus went everywhere proclaiming the coming of the God's reign, calling people to repent of their sins and believe the Good news that their sins are forgiven in Him. His was an authoritative Word. It wasn't some detached, impersonal, speculative word, but an authoritative, personal Word, calling out to people and speaking to their

souls. It was a dynamic, living Word spoken to real, live people, calling them home to God – a God who knows all their sins but in His mercy forgives them for the sake of his Son, their Savior.

And all this wasn't only something that happened a long time ago in a land far away. For Jesus Christ is still preaching that same Word today – to you! I've been telling you how "His Word 'possessed' authority," but now I want you to see how that Word of authority – that living, active, powerful Word – is still coming to you now! Do your many sins trouble you? They should, but listen, those sins are forgiven! Does the tempter and accuser of our souls cause you grief and doubt? Of course he does, but listen, the devil has no power over you! Does the fear of death and judgment loom large in your mind like a black cloud? Absolutely, but listen, death has been defeated! "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Listen, your body – that old achy body you daily have to put up with here in this life – that body will be restored perfectly on the day of the resurrection!

You see, Christ has spoken His Word of authority over you in Holy Baptism, even as He did with Liam just short time ago here at the font. There the Triune God placed His name on you and claimed you as His own. Even now Christ speaks His authoritative Word of absolution into your ears through His authorized ambassador when he says to you: "I forgive you all your sins." Christ speaks and authorizes His Holy Supper: "This is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Because Christ wants you to hear and believe this Good News, He speaks His authoritative Word of salvation to you over and over again! This Word is for you! It's a Word that possesses authority," declaring you to be free, to be God's child for all eternity, a member of God's forever family! May it always be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.