

Lectionary Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Sermon Title: *The Amazing, Astonishing Authority of Jesus*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the first chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, “*Authority.*” What is your reaction when you hear the word, “*authority*”? I’m guessing that many of us would have a negative reaction to it. We Americans, in our culture, tend not to like authority and anyone exercising it over us. And to a degree, that’s understandable. We don’t like anyone telling us what to do. For example, “*You’re not the boss of me!*” we would say.

However, today I would like us to rethink this matter of “*authority.*” Today we will meet someone Who has a lot of authority – and knows how to use it! It’s Jesus, of course. And when He exercises authority, He’s doing it for us, for our good.

Therefore, in today’s Gospel Reading, from Mark chapter 1, we see Jesus exercising authority, not over us, but for us. So now let’s take a look at: THE AMAZING, ASTONISHING AUTHORITY OF JESUS.

I. I suppose we should first explain what is meant by the word “*authority.*” We associate it with the word “*power.*” However, there’s a distinction between the two terms. Someone could exercise power without the legitimate authority to do so. So, authority is something that is vested in someone, it is conferred upon him or her, to act with power for a legitimate cause.

And Jesus has it. He has divine authority, to exercise power for the purpose for which He was sent in many ways. His:

- Authority in His words and in His works.
- Authority in His preaching and teaching.
- Authority in His calling of disciples.
- Authority in His works of healing.
- Authority in His of casting out demons.
- Authority in His power over nature.
- Authority in His power to forgive sins.

Today our attention is drawn to two aspects of Jesus' authoritative ministry, namely:

- His teaching.
- His casting out of demons.

In both of these areas, Jesus' authority is amazing and astonishing. And this is what makes a big impression on people.

II. We begin with His teaching: "They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (vv 21-22).

Yes, Jesus taught them as one having authority. How was that different from the scribes? The scribes and the rabbis would quote each other, and things got kind of detached from the original Word of God. Furthermore, their teaching itself got away from the Word of God in its content and meaning and purpose.

However, Jesus' teaching was so much different. He spoke with authority. He didn't have to quote this rabbi or that rabbi. He went straight to the source, the Word of God.

In His teaching, Jesus got right to the heart of the matter, saying things like: "*You have heard that it was said . . . but I say unto you*" (Matthew 5:27-28). That's speaking with authority. He expounded the Law of God according to God's purpose and intent. Therefore, Jesus spoke and taught with authority, and it was astonishing.

Now why is Jesus' authority in teaching important for you? Two reasons come to mind:

- One, you can trust what He says.
- And two, His teaching will lead you to salvation.

First, then, you can trust what Jesus says. He is, after all, the very Son of God come in the flesh. So, if there is ever anyone who knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what the original intent and purpose and meaning of Scripture is, it is Jesus. You can rely on His words.

Secondly, Jesus' teaching will lead you to salvation. In His teaching on the Law, Jesus stripped away the false righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. They thought they had kept God's Law pretty well – well enough to be counted righteous before God.

However, Jesus would put a stop to that kind of thinking. For example, teaching:

- "*If you are angry with your brother, you have committed murder*" (Matthew 5:21-22).
- "*If you look at another man's wife with lust in your heart, you have committed adultery*" (Matthew 5:27-28).
- "*So, stop thinking you have kept God's Law well enough to be counted righteous. You haven't.*"

And that applies to you and me, too. We have not kept the commandments well enough. We need to have our self-righteousness stripped away from us, too. However, not so that we are left in despair. But so that we will realize our need and be ready to receive the only true righteousness that works and that comes to us in the person of Christ, our Savior.

So that is the other part of Jesus' teaching we need to hear: The Gospel. The words of comfort and forgiveness Christ speaks:

- *“Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28).
- *“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28).

That's why Simon Peter proclaimed: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

Indeed, Jesus' teaching carries this great and life-giving authority. He comes straight from the Father's side, full of grace and truth. It's Jesus Who makes God known to us in truth and purity displayed in His teaching. For this is God's beloved Son. Listen to Him!

III. And now a second area in which Jesus' authority is seen in our text is His authority over unclean spirits: *“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.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him’”* (vv 23-27).

Yes, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and here we see Him getting a head start on it:

- To restore creation.
- To fix what was broken.
- To bring healing to the afflicted.
- To bestow the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.

In our text, we see Him doing it.

There is a poor man there under the sway and in the thrall of an unclean spirit – a demon, we would say. The unclean spirit has overtaken the man. And now in the presence of Jesus, the spirit blurts out in fear of the One Who has the superior authority, and that is Jesus.

Note that the unclean spirit recognizes Who Jesus is, that He is “*the Holy One of God*” (v 24). And indeed, Jesus is just that. But Jesus doesn’t want demons to be doing witnessing for Him. So, He tells the demon to shut up and to come out of the man. Which is what happens, of course. Therefore, Jesus’ authority extends over the devil and the unclean spirits and over all the powers of hell.

You see, the devil would like to use your sins against you, to accuse you before God, saying: “*See? Look at that one there. She claims she’s a Christian. But look at what she’s doing! Sinning, gossiping, thinking hateful thoughts. How can you let that one into heaven?*”

That’s what the devil would say about you or any one of us for that matter. And he would be right, as far as your righteousness under the Law goes. You would be guilty and thus shut out of the kingdom of heaven and be sent straight to hell.

But Jesus, your Savior, has defeated the devil for you. The blood that He shed on the cross for you, covers all your sins. You are clean now. The devil has nothing on you, nothing to accuse you with. Your sins are forgiven, for Christ’s sake.

And so, you see the authority of Jesus working for you today. This is the reason I was able to say to you today: “*In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins.*”

The authority of Jesus stands behind my words. He’s authorized me to do this for you. Or again, in a few minutes you will hear Jesus saying to you: “*This is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*”

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, you can take those words to the bank! Yes, today you can rejoice in this fact: The astonishing, amazing, life-giving authority of Jesus is working for you!

In the name of † Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!