

“Marking Time: Authority”
Mark 1:21-28

Today we continue on our journey of ‘Marking Time’ until Lent. Each week there has been a key word in each passage to focus our attention on. The first week it was **baptism**, and the power of the **Holy Spirit** that ALL of us who are baptized believers in Christ should rely on in our daily living. (Not that we often DO!) The next passage from Mark we considered was about the **calling** of the first disciples by **Jesus**. That just as Jesus ‘hooked’ those fishermen turned ‘fishers of men,’ we too need to cast out our lines in order to help Jesus ‘reel’ people to Him.

Today, the ‘keyword’ in Mark’s Gospel reading is **“authority.”** Twice in just 6 verses we hear of the people who witnessed Jesus’ words, and actions, in the synagogue... the ‘church’... and of how they were **“astounded”** and **“amazed”** at how Jesus acted with such **“authority.”** Why is this term “authority” so important? With this word buzzing around in my head, I went to one of my favorite sources of wisdom and inspiration. No, not the Bible... but *Webster’s Dictionary*. (See, I don’t always ‘google’ everything!)

“Authority” is defined as the *“right to control, or command.”* An ‘authority’ is *“an accepted source of information... an author, or expert.”* For someone to be an ‘authority,’ they must have a certain degree of **power**... power which flows out of their **knowledge**. Their power is a direct result of what they know.

So let’s think about this. This 30-something man from Nazareth, a small town west of the Sea of Galilee, comes into the local church and begins teaching. (A brief aside here: where was Jesus on the Sabbath, the customary day of honoring God? On the golf course? At the mall? No. In church. Hmm... if it’s good enough for Jesus...)

Anyway, this stranger comes into church, that no one has laid eyes on before, and he starts to teach from the Hebrew Scriptures... their ‘Bible.’ Now, I know that it doesn’t say that explicitly in this passage, but reference IS made to **“the scribes.”** These were, in essence, professional interpreters of the Law. Ones whose profession was to know the Torah, the Jewish ‘Bible,’ and to be able to proclaim its meaning to followers of “The Book.” (Hmm... sounds kind of like ‘preachers’, doesn’t it?)

So this small-town boy Jesus, the son of a Jewish carpenter, starts teaching in a way that far surpasses that of the 'paid pious professional'... speaking as an 'expert' on the subject of God. Heresy? More like *authority*. For Jesus spoke as 'an accepted source of information... an expert... with the 'right to command' the respect of His audience.

But then it gets even better! One of the church members who had some really 'wicked' stuff going on in his life speaks up. Well, not the man himself, but an evil voice speaking through him. Kind of like these 'multiple personality disorders' that you hear about. But one of a decidedly spiritual nature that sure knew who Jesus was.

Can you imagine something like that taking place HERE? It's bad enough when George speaks up! But when out-of-the-blue this person right next to you speaks out in a voice not their own, challenging the preacher of God's Word, well, wouldn't that really 'freak you out?' Somehow, I don't think that 'possessed parishioner tirade' was in that day's 'order of worship!'

But what about Jesus? Was His reaction agitated, upset? No. He speaks calmly. Firmly. He orders the evil spirit(s) to come out of the man. He speaks as one with 'right to control, command.' As one with **authority**. The spirit obeyed. And the people were amazed. In awe of one who spoke with a sense of confidence never seen in any of their previous religious 'spokesmen.'

Where did Jesus' authority come from? How was his 'right to command' such respect expressed? By the way he SPOKE. The way he ACTED. By the use of God's WORD. They may not have known him, but they knew who He reflected. Who He sounded like. Who He acted like. YHWH. God the Father. The **words** and **actions** of this "**Holy One of God**" ... the Son... carried the same weight, the same power, as those of His Dad. The only One worthy of the 'right to control.'

Speaking of 'dads,' you may have heard me mention my father before. Hard working, compassionate, innovative, good-spirited... a man of integrity. Highly respected in the civic and business community. A down-to-earth man who loved his Optimo cigars and Ambassador scotch. He has been gone now for nearly 25 years. But there still would be no higher compliment to me that to be compared to him. There would be no greater earthly accolade than for someone to say that my words or actions reminded them of my father. And I hope

that he is pleased with the man I've become, as imperfect as I am. I hope that in some way I am a reflection of his character, of what he stood for.

When people hear you speak, who do they hear? Do your actions bear a recognizable witness to someone greater than yourself... someone you would aspire to be like? We should remember the words of Jesus to the disciples in *John 14*. Now this chapter is perhaps best known for some of the most definitive words ever spoken about the Christian faith... words spoken to that 'Doubting Thomas' who questioned just how to get to the place where Jesus was going... to which our Lord replied: ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."*** (14:6)

Jesus goes on to say that ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... (that) The words that I say are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."*** (9b, 10b-c) Our Lord later declares, ***"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing."*** (v. 12a)

Even Jesus, the very Son of God, wouldn't take credit for His words and deeds. But rather, He pointed back to His Heavenly Father. What Jesus said and did wasn't just about Him, but about the One who was, in His own words, ***"living in me... doing his work."*** It was with NO hesitation, with great confidence... dare I say it, with great *pride*...that Jesus declared that *'anyone who sees me sees my Father.'* The Father that Jesus refers to as *"Abba..." 'daddy.'* You see me, you see my Dad. When I speak, it is not just my words, but the words of the One who sent me.'

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said that ***"anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing."*** That means that if we have faith in Jesus, we should do what He does, think how he thinks, act like He acts. In the words of *Philippians*, ***"Your attitude* (and mine!) ***should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."*** (2:5) That 'attitude of altitude' means 'higher thoughts', ones that come to us by seeking God's will in prayer, being in His Word, serving His people... striving every day to be able to say, like Jesus, the Father is ***"living in me... doing his work."*** This ability to speak and act with **authority** is not reserved for God's only 'begotten' Son... it is also for all of His 'adopted' children as well!**

My first Sunday to preach here, back in June of last year, some of you may recall a family that came to visit F.P.C. – Scott and Qsonda, and their three children. Scott hangs sheetrock for a living. Works very hard. Never really had a lot of time for church. When I first got to know him, he and his family only sporadically came to the church I served previously. But in the midst of some family struggles, Scott began to attend a non-denominational church in the area. It was there that he came to truly become a follower of Jesus Christ. His faith turned from not ‘what’ you know, but ‘who’ you know... that ‘30-something carpenter’s son from Nazareth.’ I witnessed a transformation in this ‘30-something sheetrocker from Covington’... going from a guy who drank a lot of beer and talked a lot of football to one who drinks of a different ‘Spirit’ and talks a lot of **Jesus**. He even thought enough of this brother-in-Christ that he brought his whole family some 200 miles just to spend a Sunday morning in church. He still sends me daily Bible readings by text message every morning. Indeed, it is nothing less that ‘astounding’ that Scott speaks now with such ‘authority’... because of the One who speaks through Him. More than ever before, Scott’s words are not his own. For they come, at least in part, from the ‘Source of all wisdom’... the One ***‘living in him... doing his work’*** through him.

The same God who is using this simple ‘drywall disciple’ seeks to use you and me as well. The same Father who wants us to be ‘brothers’ to His Son. Do you want people to be ‘amazed’ at how you speak and act with such authority?

Easy. Just repeat after Jesus: ***“The words that I say are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”*** May the words you say... no matter how difficult the situation... not be your own. But the words, and actions, of the One living in you. The One who is doing His work through you. To HIM be all glory and honor, dominion and power, now and forever! Amen!

Affirmation of Faith: We have spoken today about ‘authority’... which comes from the root word, ‘author.’ When I hear this word, particularly in relation to our Christian faith, I think about words of Scripture that speak of the ‘author and perfecter of our faith.’ Let us now affirm that faith using words from *Hebrews 12*, as together we proclaim our trust in the One who should be the ultimate authority in our life, Jesus Christ. Would you please rise as we read verses 1-3 of that 12th chapter of Hebrews...