

Sermon – 4th Epiphany
Mark 1:21-28
January 28, 2018

“The Authority Song...of Jesus”

“I fight authority, authority always win. I’ve been doing it since I was a young kid and I come out grinning.’ I fight authority, authority always wins.”

John Mellencamp – “The Authority Song”

“He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” Mark 1:22b

Websters says authority is *“the power to command, influence or judge; a right; an accepted source of definitive information; or expert in a specific field.”* Here’s another way to look at it; *“A policeman’s glove has authority. Just try speeding past it some time. The hand in that glove will share a piece of paper with you, with your signature on it.”*

Our lesson from Deuteronomy and gospel from Mark concern themselves with authority. In Deuteronomy, Moses recalls how frightened Israel was when God spoke directly to them from Mount Sinai, from whence God gave the Ten Commandments. *“Enough”* – God’s voice was overwhelming to them. God evidently agreed, and so Moses says God will speak through prophets. But they’d better listen and with discernment - prophets had “authority” but that authority was not intrinsic – but derived from what they said. Prophets who only wanted a name for themselves instead of speaking hard truths in God’s name were labeled false and would be reckoned with. Folks who heard true prophets and dismissed hard truths suffered for it.

The New Testament book of Hebrews begins; *“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”* Hebrews speaks of this Son as *“the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.”* What does it mean? God whose voice the people of Israel shuddered to hear at Sinai now speaks directly through Jesus – whom John the Baptist said was *“full of truth...and grace.”* Prophets are like *“policeman’s gloves”* – they have authority but not of themselves – only because of the job they do and the law they enforce.

We preachers are like that – our only authority is derived from our speaking on God’s behalf. Here is where Deuteronomy applies to us – we’d better bring the goods to you – the good gospel that is. If we do then the onus is on you to listen, believe and live it. Moses couldn’t just go off spouting this command and that opinion to Israel - which is why the context for what God says about a prophet is the Covenant of Sinai – a covenant God made with a nation not just Moses, words that everyone had heard, and were expected to know.

God has spoken to *you* through his Son Jesus, just as God spoke to Israel through commandments. They differ of course in content, Jesus and the Ten Commandments, but both are God's word and 'public' words. Jesus spoke publically to a man with a horde of demons in his soul and they understood what they were up against— the authority of God. Jesus said to you *“I am the way, the truth and the life”, “I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life”, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*

Jesus, with the same authority that sent demons out the door, said in John 20:22 *“if you forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven.”* And yet what demons believed we sinners often don't – or somehow can't! To the sins harbored in your heart Jesus says *“come out!”* Jesus wouldn't say it if he didn't mean it. John 1:12 says; *“to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”* That word translated as “power” is the very same word translated as *“authority”* in our lesson from Mark. You have the power to live as emancipated of your sins as a man in a synagogue was emancipated of his demons.

I sat this week in my study and said to myself...*“ok, how does an exorcism apply to anyone in our churches?”* Whose going take this lesson home and put it to work raising their kids or deciding what to try to deduct on their income taxes? True, those sort of connections not easy to see. What is however is how this story applies to Jesus because it tells us what Jesus can do, and therefore what we can expect from him. Like John Mellencamp said in his song we fight authority – God's truth. In our confession of sin each week we admit that fight is in our very bones and that sin condemns us - fighting it since we were young, with or without grinning but fighting it like it's gonna harm us. Why keep “fightin” the authority of Jesus when he can when it can set you free?

Jesus didn't speak “authoritatively” to the man in our story to condemn him, but to free him. Our takeaway from this story is to imagine how good life became for this man without his demons frolicking inside him every day. In Romans 1:16 it says the gospel *“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.”* Your faith gives you *that* power - an authority that always wins. Jesus in you, Jesus for you. If you live by the Spirit, and you do, then walk with that same Spirit of grace and truth. Then just try to keep from grinning! AMEN