



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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SERMON – 4<sup>TH</sup> EASTER

ACTS 4:1-12

APRIL 25, 2021

## “AUTHORITY...OR OPPORTUNITY?”

So once again we ask, what is the church? It is the “beloved community” – people who gather and call upon the name of Jesus in prayer, praise and thanksgiving, who cannot understand themselves nor their lives apart from Christ. Christians are those of whom Paul said, *“the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

The church is the Kingdom of God – people who have come to understand themselves as servants of the servant King. Christians are those of whom Paul said, *“we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* The church is the representative of Jesus in the world. We are in communion with and descendants of the Apostles, to whom Jesus said *“all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”* Christians are those of whom Paul said, *“we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

And it is to those words, “power” and “authority” that we turn today. In our lesson from Acts 4, Peter and John are asked, by the very same men who arrested Jesus, just who *they* thought they were. *“By what power or what name did you do this (healing of a paralytic)?”* Jesus had referred to “his power” often, and in Acts 1:8 said to his disciples *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”* Clearly, Christ’s power was now evident in them.

Romans 1:16 says the gospel is *“the power of God for salvation.”* Ephesians 3:20 says that *“(Christ) is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine according to his power that is at work in us.”* “Power” in the New Testament is understood as strength or ability – in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents, servants are given sums of money in accordance with their “power”, though the word for power is translated in that story as “ability.” The Greek word for power is the root for the English word “dynamite.” You get the idea.

The resurrection of Jesus had given the church power – first evident in the ability to show extraordinary love for one another, then turn that love toward those that were not of the faith and in our lesson today proclaim plainly and without equivocation that Jesus is Lord - *“salvation is found in no one else...there is no other name.”* The church says this not because we think it furthers our organizational purposes or aspirations, but because Jesus told us this was so and both commanded and empowers us to say it.

Power then, is a word closely related to authority. Jesus in our gospel reading says (of his own life) *“I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”* In that context it meant Jesus, as God, is alone able to determine the course of his life – and if he *chooses* to let that life go, it is he and he alone who will do so. Jesus does not give us, his church, that kind of authority though many Christian martyrs have given their life away instead of renouncing their faith.

How then should the church regard it’s authority? To do that I am going to venture where it might be said “angels fear to tread” to a use of the word “authority” found in I Timothy 2:12. Paul

says (in the context of public worship) *"I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man."* But here Paul uses a different Greek word for authority than was used in John's gospel. In Timothy, the word does not suggest something given but something taken – it means "self-appointed" authority, seized authority, not bestowed.

The authority which Jesus bestowed on His church is precisely not like that – it is to be discharged "in submission" to Christ – because Christians know *"there is no other name"* by which we can be saved. Sadly, much of contemporary culture thinks it is humiliating to submit to anything, let alone God. We submit to one another though out of reverence for Christ.

To worship God, receive forgiveness, and submit to His discipline seems so..."undemocratic." I know that seems strange to say, but I'm glad we are again kneeling in confession to God as we begin our worship. I know our gracious Lord has heard and would hear our confessions without this gesture, but it seems to me a good thing to do. We, the beloved community, bestowed with authority to proclaim Jesus' rule, nevertheless do well to remember we have a ruler.

In the ancient world, making the sort of claim Peter did about Jesus' authority would have scandalized just about everyone. Religion was rife in those days. But religions did not concern themselves so much with proper behavior, or proper belief so much as making proper sacrifices at proper times to sort of keep the gods at bay. Judaism and its offspring Christianity changed all that, and the church in particular has united faith and moral action under one name – Jesus.

So how do we use our "authority?" In submission to Christ. Greta Ullin was a young Swedish missionary to Tanzania in the 1940's. She was a nurse, eager to go into the villages near her station to heal. Nothing doing with the residents of the villages, however. The evening prayers emanating from the station and the Sunday worship didn't attract a single villager. One day though Greta was summoned to attend a patient in the village – and with excitement donned her new white nurses dress and headed on over.

When she arrived, she was escorted to her patient...a village elder's donkey...with an infected abscess on its belly. With great reluctance, Greta took her brand-spanking new syringe and drained the wound...cleaned it, applied salve...and was sent home. Days later, when the wound healed...the elders called her again, saying she could now treat their children. Months later, they agreed to receive the mission station's evangelist. *I have other sheep...that are not of this pen indeed!* So this is what we do, we seek them – by way of a donkey if necessary!

Peter and John may have been spared a death sentence the day they appeared before the High Priests, because a nameless formerly crippled man stood right next to him, healed in the name of Jesus. His being there frustrated Peter's accusers – but it disarmed them too. The world today is not so swayed by creeds – it all but dares anyone to claim authority in matters of religion - but when our creeds and confessions are accompanied by charity and kindness, the beloved community gets the chance to do what we were created for - name the name. AMEN