

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Authority! It's all about authority. "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Authority comes up a lot in Jesus' ministry. Quite early in his teaching, folks noted that he taught as one with authority, not as the scribes. Early in his ministry, the centurion said to Jesus just say the word and my servant will be healed, for I myself am under authority, with men under me. I say to one go and he goes, to another come and he comes. Just say the word. Jesus' authority had been recognized, the centurion knew that Jesus could heal with simply a word because he told Jesus he was not worthy to have Jesus under his roof. Remember the man lowered through the roof? Scribes and Pharisees muttering who does he think he is to forgive this man his sins? Jesus' response that he has the authority and to show it, he not only has forgiven the man's sins but he tells him to get up and walk as well. And now Jesus has cleansed the outer courtyard of the temple of money-changers and animal vendors, and then withered a fig tree. So by what authority and who gave it to you?

The Son of God, the Word made Flesh, God Incarnate. Teaching with authority, healing and forgiving sins, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, all with authority. And rather than directly answer their question, Jesus answers with a question, a question concerning John's baptizing. Is it of God, or of man? Answer that and I will answer you. Now consider that John was sent by God, a latter-day Elijah, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "prepare the way of the Lord!" John sent with this mission, preaching repentance, baptizing repentance, John with authority.

So if the chief priests and elders couldn't make up their mind about John, well, neither will they be able to make up their minds about Jesus. If John's baptism was of God, well then, they will connect that John prepared the way for Jesus. But their unbelief has veiled their eyes, even when they talk among themselves, they are simply trying to come up with an answer to Jesus question so he'll answer theirs' and they can trip him up, have grounds to arrest him.

Now I admit, I have often been somewhat anti-authority myself, a little bit of a rebellious streak I suppose, I don't like just about anybody telling me what I must or must not do. Now my wife has pointed out that I have been in authority pretty much my entire life, talk about taking the wind out of my sails! Anti-authority? Maybe not, maybe I want the authority myself. But the truth is, I don't want it.

Whatever I feel about authority, I try to do my best not to reject Jesus' authority; to love God, to love my neighbor, to love one another as he loves, to do unto others even as I would have done unto me. Jesus' words carry incredible weight with me, he is after all, the author of my faith, he completes it in me, he is my salvation.

Then Jesus tells them a parable. The "second son" is them, the chief priests and elders of the people, they are "first" and they are in no doubt as to what Jesus is saying. Those entrusted with much have not lived up to the trust that God has

placed in them, they talk the good fight, but that's all it is, talk. Then there is the first son, he refused to obey his father, but he goes and does it after all. Ah yes, the tax collectors and the sinners, oh, that's right, you and me. Sinners all, everyone of us. Sure we're baptized, confirmed, we'll be buried by the church, and we're here in the in-between. Helping out, serving as needed, but truthfully, we still don't measure up. Good thing we don't have to earn our way to salvation, because we couldn't do it.

But hear the Good News! Our salvation, our faith, is a gift of God's grace. You've heard that countless times, but it's a story I love to share, the love of God, so radical, so familiar, so surprising, comes to us and brings us home, home to where we belong, home to where our hearts long to be.

The forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, the gift of faith, we have it by Christ's authority! AMEN