

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

Think of our gospel this morning, the Holy One of God, in the synagogue, a holy place, on the Sabbath, a holy day. Jesus is there, teaching in that synagogue in Capernaum, teaching as “one having authority.” Authority recognized by both the people in attendance, and by an unclean spirit. People were astounded at his teaching, while the unclean spirit cries 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.” The people listening to Jesus were right to be astounded, and the unclean spirit gets it right too, a confession like that of Peter “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” or that of Thomas “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus is teaching as one who has authority, not imagined authority like many today, not just sound bites and statements. He wasn't angry or using rhetorical techniques to impress those in the synagogue. Our gospel does not say what Jesus taught. It does not indicate what the people thought they heard. But he taught as one having authority, his words authoritative. His words accompanied by an action on his part, commanding an unclean spirit to leave a man.

Jesus' authority was heard and seen, words accompanied by actions that spoke louder than words. There was power in Jesus' words as there is power in all words. Words evoke a response, laughter, anger, crying, consideration and contemplation. Words can evoke a rise in blood pressure, or be calming. And there is incredible power in actions. It's said that “a picture is worth a thousand words,” so actions are actual moving pictures that must be worth thousands of words. Seeing actions, participating in actions, has an even more powerful effect, especially combined with words.

God's word is a word of action, revealed in Christ Jesus. God speaks and it happens, creation and light exist. Jesus teaches with authority, God revealed in him. Not human authority, not an authority that is valued by our secular society or the world, not just talking, or telling people what to do or what not to do, authority not authoritarianism. Jesus' authority is heard and seen and brings people to the living God, whether possessed by an unclean spirit or captivated by the values of the world. Jesus' authority is heard and seen in the giving of himself for you and me.

Jesus' authority is not vested in him through winning an election, or because he spoke softly and carried the biggest stick. He is not coercing or cajoling, Jesus' authority is heard and seen in ways that benefit other people. His authority brings us freedom, freedom from sin, his authority lets us grow in life, in discipleship, in ways that show the love of God, and of neighbor. Jesus' authority is self-giving love, love that hurts, and takes hurts, love that heals. What Jesus teaches with authority is from God, whether about sin, or about loving God and neighbor, about obedience, forgiveness and love.

Now if we do not listen to him, if we go our own way, because we do not want

anyone to tell us what to do, well, Jesus will not be heard or seen. But where he is heard, there he will be seen. Seen in the ultimate act of giving himself for us. Seen in the cross, where death was destroyed and life, real life with God was given to all who believe. The final authority for our sins, for us, seen and heard, not through words that compel or command, but in the giving of self for others.

Jesus speaks and acts for us, he reveals our sin, he forgives us, he gives himself for us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, his body and blood in the bread and wine. Jesus is heard and seen at work here whenever we have the Eucharist. You know, there have been times when a sermon or a teaching has moved me in a powerful way. I have been convicted of sin, yet forgiven and made righteous. So I proclaim forgiveness by Christ's authority. Proclaiming the Good News. Sharing with you the words of God's grace, sharing with you the love of God while feeling it in my own life. Jesus cleanses us. Jesus makes us holy and restores us to communion with each other, and with him.

AMEN