

**Mark 1:27 Everyone was so amazed ...
They said, "What is this? A new teaching
with authority!"**

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was only a two-word bumper sticker, but it was loaded with volumes of social commentary. Perhaps you've seen it: "Question authority."

Behind that two-word bumper sticker are some important questions. Is there anyone, besides ourselves, that we can trust? Is there any authority figure that we can believe without reservation? Is there anyone, besides ourselves, that is worthy of our total allegiance?

Our text for today provides us with the answers to those questions. Yes, there is someone else we can trust. Yes, there is an authority figure we can believe. Yes, there is someone else worthy of our total allegiance. This is the welcome truth as we see **Jesus Revealed: A Teacher with Authority**.

Sometime after Jesus had been baptized, after he had performed his first miracle at the wedding in Cana, and after calling the first disciples, Jesus relocated to Capernaum, a crossroads town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter, James, John, and Andrew were all from this town. It sat along trade routes and made for quick transportation across the Sea to other parts of Galilee. In these early days of Jesus' ministry, opposition hadn't yet arisen against him from the Pharisees in the north. In fact, this particular Sabbath, as Jesus freely went to church at the local synagogue, he was invited to preach. And when he did, **[the people] were amazed at his teaching, because he was teaching them as one who has authority, not as the experts in the law.**

There was something special in Jesus' teaching style, his methods, his words as he was preaching in the synagogue. So

much so, we're told, that the people *were amazed at his teaching*.

You see, Jesus didn't teach as others of that day taught. When the Scribes stood up to teach, they always appealed to other authorities besides themselves. They would say, "According to Rabbi Gamaliel . . . or according to Rabbi Hillel . . . or according to Rabbi Shammai . . ." and then they would teach. But they would always appeal to external authorities to substantiate their views.

No different than today, really. In order to convince someone of the validity of what we are saying, we'll appeal to a recognized authority. For instance, if I were talking to you about the psychological effects of divorce on children, I might appeal to a respected expert like Dr. James Dobson. Or if I were talking to you about social justice I might quote from Dr. Martin Luther King. If I wanted to make a point about L.A. Gangsta rap, I might appeal to Dr. Dre. The reason I would do this is because if I just said, *well this is the way it is*, you may question whether I knew what I was talking about. You may say, "What makes *you* an authority on this subject?"

Jesus, on the other hand, appealed to no one. Why? Because as God he was and is the ultimate authority, the final authority. And that obviously came through loud and clear. Think, for example, of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He would introduce many of the subjects he addressed with the formula, **"You have heard... but I say."** Now we don't have a recording of Jesus' voice, but we can imagine it was the calm and assured intonation of one who knew exactly what he was talking about. It *was* the voice of authority.

Only it wasn't just his method that made Jesus different. Jesus also differed from other teachers in his content. We know from history that often times synagogue sermons would major in minors, trivialities, and legalistic interpretations on obscure matters...all trying to prove how smart they were. In contrast, Jesus talked

about important things – matters of life and death, about salvation and eternity. He talked about the kingdom of God. In short, he preached the Gospel. And for many it was the first time that they had heard it. The result: ***They were amazed at His teaching...*** And quite frankly, that would have been enough. But what happened next amazed them even more:

Just then there was a man with an unclean spirit in their synagogue. It cried out, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!" From the New Testament, we know that demon possession was not uncommon at the time of Jesus. This particular evil spirit spoke through the afflicted man and gave evidence that it clearly understood not only who Jesus is – ***The Holy One of God*** – but also what Jesus came to do: destroy Satan and his minions.

Jesus, however, is not interested in a conversation with evil. He ***rebuked the spirit saying "Be quiet! Come out of him!"*** ***The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions, and after crying out with a loud voice, it came out of him.*** With the same authority that marked His teaching just minutes before, Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave. And it did. Banished at the word of the Lord. Predictably, this caused quite a stir.

Everyone was so amazed that they began to discuss this with each other. They said, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" Once again (and for the second time in our text) the people are described as being ***amazed***. And once again they marveled at his ***authority*** now demonstrated by this tremendous display of divine power. This, obviously, was some big news and people couldn't keep it to themselves: ***News about him spread quickly through all the region of Galilee.*** And it was probably something like this: Jesus Christ, ***the Holy One of God*** is the voice of absolute authority.

But is he the voice of absolute authority in your life? The *Guinness Book of World Records* lists a guy by the name of Joe Girardi as the world's top salesman. He sold more than 13,000 cars in the span of 15 years. His subsequent book claims that with the right strategy "*You Can Sell Anything to Anybody.*" In our capitalist culture, selling and buying is king. It has major authority, major influence upon how individual people live their lives.

Ask yourself: "What authorities rule your life, influence your life?" Is it money – buying and selling? Is it family? Is it technology? Is it a job, a boss, a career? A good discipline for each of us would be to go home today and on a piece of paper write the various authorities, the various influences upon our lives, and then try to put them in some sort of prioritized order.

But in the meantime, I'd like you to try that mentally right now. What's the highest authority in your life? What are the biggest influences on who you are and what you do? Money is very, very high on that list isn't it? Higher maybe than we would like to admit. But even then, most of us would have to say, if we're really honest, that the leading authority in our lives...is that god whose name has only two letters: M & E. The god "me," our own sinful wants. Our own sinful desires.

The truth is, we tend to live the way we *want* to live rather than how Jesus would *have* us live. Oh sure, we *say* Jesus is the authority in our lives but do we show it, do we live it? Look at your actions this past week. How much money did you spend on *yourself* compared to what you're about to put in the collection plate? How much time did you spend reading your Bibles compared to watching your favorite TV shows? How many times did you put your spouse's needs and wants ahead of *your own*? How many times did you do what *you* want rather than what your parents or teachers told you to do?...

Now I'm not going to tell you this morning that you're sinning because you

spent more time breathing this week than praying. That's not my point. Rather, the point is to take the time to recognize who and what has the ultimate authority in your life. Is it Jesus? Oh sure, we *say* Jesus is the authority in our lives but is he really?

Thank God that he is! Despite our trying to live *our* way, despite our trying to get out from under *his* authority, he never gave up on us. Instead he traded his heavenly throne for a manger, his paradise for hell. And it was on the cross that Jesus showed not only the ultimate act of love but also the ultimate authority for it was on the cross that Jesus met Satan head on...and won. And he showed, he proved, his ultimate authority over sin, over hell, over Satan with his resurrection from the dead. This he did for you. When you were his enemy he showered you with love. When you were dirty with sin he washed you clean with his own blood. When your sinful heart was the highest authority in your life, he kicked open its door, cleaned it up, and made it his home. He has made you his child and made himself the ultimate authority in your life. And because of that, the Son of God is the authority for the way in which we *live* our lives. It's no longer for ourselves. It's only for him. It's not according to the god "me," our sinful desires, but according to his will; just as Paul proclaimed, ***[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***

We began with a bumper sticker that asked us to question authority. While others may cynically search for it, rejoice that we have the Voice of Authority among us: Jesus Christ. Jesus has, and continues to, speak to you through his unchanging, authoritative Word. And there he not only speaks to you, but he also gives an authoritative example of how to live as his disciples. Jesus is revealed as the authority in your life. Live not for yourself. Live for him. **Amen.**