

## **"One Having Authority"**

Epiphany 4B, 1 February 2009

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Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Prayer.

Exousia!

Exousia, the Greek sings.

Jesus taught with exousia,

And not as one of the scribes.

This exousia is more than authority;

It's root means "it is free,"

"it is permitted."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus taught with a sovereign freedom,

With divine permission,

Especially when compared to the scribes,

Who were chained and shackled to the Torah.

Jesus is free to expand upon the Word,

Whereas the scribes were only able to cite the Word.

What a difference this makes.

This is the difference between a professor and a preacher;

Between a scribe and a prophet.

This freedom allow Jesus to tap into the divine

And speak as the mouthpiece of God.

Jesus can take the stale and stogie meaning of Messiah,

For example,

Literally from the sacred text,

Meaning a political leader who will re-establish the Davidic kingdom, saving the people,

And develop and expand the meaning of Messiah one step further;

Messiah can be expanded to mean

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Stephen Hultgren, Assistant Professor of Theology, Fordham University, New York, NY

God's own Son,  
Sent to save the world from sin  
And to give to all who believe  
Eternal life.  
Now that's authority.  
If you want that old time religion,  
Go see a scribe,  
But if you want your life to change,  
Go seek out Jesus.

So as Jesus is teaching with exousia,  
A man with an unclean spirit stands and interrupts him.  
You might be surprised to hear this,  
Considering it rude (which it is),  
And wholly unconceivable here at Zion.  
Sharon often tells me that I should write a book about my pastoral experiences  
And some day I might,  
Simply because I'm not smart enough to make it up.  
But it happens, and it has happened to me twice:  
Once was a disgruntled treasurer,  
And the other was a "ditto head" (devotee of Rush Limbaugh),  
A veteran,  
Who believed I was unpatriotic for not supporting the first Gulf War.  
Each time the focus was stolen and the service grinded to a stop.  
Talk about a pregnant pause;  
Much like what I am certain happened with Jesus and this possessed man.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?"  
the man explodes with a cultural slam,  
like calling him a country bumpkin from a different area code.  
He implies with his question that Jesus has nothing to do with the people of Capernaum.  
"Have you come to destroy us?" he asks.  
He implies he is there to change their way of life to something worse than what they already  
enjoy.  
"Destroy" is not a soft word. It pretty much means  
the destruction, the annihilation of everything that is known.  
Have you come to nuke organized religion? He is essentially saying.  
"I know who you are," the man proclaims  
probably loud enough for everyone in the room to hear.  
"You are the Holy One of God."  
To know a person's name in ancient Palestine  
Is to know their identity, to have and to exert authority over them.  
I know your social security number.  
I have your driver's license in my hand.

Now that is authority.

Here is where Jesus' response trumps  
Every conceivable response by this humble preacher.  
This is where divine exousia explodes:

"Be silent!"

And there is silence,

Like the storm tossed sea that is calmed with two similar words, "be still."

There is only one authority, and that is Christ.

That authority submits to nobody,

Not even the devil in the wilderness.

That authority submits to nothing,

Not even death and burial in a stone sealed tomb.

"Be silent, and come out of him," Jesus commands.

I don't think we are talking mental illness here,

Because this man with an unclean spirit challenged Jesus with some pretty logical, linear thought.

I'm thinking this is the divine shazam!

Because the unclean spirit convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.

Now there is something you don't see everyday.

Loud and clear,

Jesus makes the statement

That he has power over both the natural world and the supernatural world;

Over wind and sea, and over demons themselves.

His miracle speaks to the message,

As is often the case with his miracles;

They highlight the point:

Jesus speaks with exousia!

With a free range authority;

With such authority that he can exorcise demons and make them submit.

It leaves the audience with the question, doesn't it:

That if Jesus has such freedom, permission, and authority that he can add to the Word,

That he can even cast out demons,

What else does Jesus have authority over?

Forgiving sins?

Perhaps even death itself?

The possibility of eternal life with God?

Yes, and even more.

In a worldly sense, Jesus had no power at all.

He wasn't a king or temple priest.

He wasn't even a scribe with the authority of Jewish tradition.

The only authority he had was the divine confidence

That what he did and said  
Was God's will and truth.  
His power came through his words and by the example of his deeds.  
His power came through becoming God's servant, the conduit through which the needs of  
humanity can be met.

Today, we celebrate at the table of our Lord.  
We partake of his body and blood  
Becoming one with Him in the flesh and one in His Spirit.  
We receive his same exousia,  
His same authority  
To change the world  
By living God's will and living faithfully according to God's truth.  
We are given the same authority  
To teach the Good News of His Gospel  
And to practice our faith according to His divine example.  
By this bread,  
And by this wine,  
We become the one through which God works  
To bring forgiveness and salvation to our needy world.

Come to the table.  
Come.  
And be one with Him.  
Amen.