

B-10
Ordinary #4
February 1, 2009

AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING

Old Testament, Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

New Testament, 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

Gospel: Mark 1: 21-28

I.

Perhaps this passage explains why it is difficult to preach and teach in a totally honest manner. It has always been tough speaking the word of God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha (and other prophets) were persecuted by their fellow countrymen for speaking what the LORD had commanded them to speak. It was tough, because what they had to say was not necessarily what the listeners wanted to hear. They all knew what it was like to have people out to “do them in,” to destroy them. Once, Elijah ran away from Israel’s Queen Jezebel, because she threatened to kill him. Elijah was so forlorn that he thought that he was the only person left who had never bowed down to an idol. It was while he was in a cave on a mountain that the LORD spoke to Elijah and spoke to his fears, gave him another assignment, and gently reminded him that there were still 7,000 who had not worshiped Baal (1 Kings 19). Jeremiah suffered much anguish for being called to speak the Word of the LORD to Judah, the word being judgment and loss; Judah would fall; Jerusalem would fall; the Temple would fall. He was arrested more than once. (Note especially his anguish in Jeremiah 20: 7-18)

To preach and teach the Word of God leaves people on one side of the fence or other. When we hear the message of the Gospel we are compelled to accept it as truth upon which to build our lives, or we dismiss it as foolishness.

That's what, I believe happened with Jesus. He goes to the synagogue in order to teach and pray. He is invited to teach. This was not unusual in that day. The leaders of the synagogue seemed to be more administrative and pastoral (feeding the widows and orphans). Different people could actually teach and expound upon the scriptures. And Jesus was evidently often allowed to speak and expound upon the scriptures.

But something was different at the synagogue that Sabbath in Capernaum. When Jesus taught, the people were astonished by his teaching. He taught with authority. It expressed the truth. It was not like the Scribes who taught, often by referring to someone else's authority. Jesus' teaching had such power that it caused a demon that had possessed a man in the congregation to cry out to Jesus,

“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!”

Then Jesus exorcised the demon possessed man and again Mark records how amazed the congregation was, because Jesus taught with authority, such authority that even the unclean spirits obeyed him.

Now, there are three of points we can reach from this passage. One point is that Mark is again demonstrating to the reader, to us, that Jesus is the Messiah, full of power and authority. He is the one announced as the Messiah. He is the one who had his son-ship confirmed by God at his baptism. He is the one who has had his identity tried and clarified while being tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

The second point is what I have been stating. Because of who he is, the Messiah, Jesus' authority emanates from him as he teaches. He needs no other power or authority upon which to rely. Jesus has his own power and authority, the power and authority of God himself. And the people in the synagogue that day experienced his power and authority.

What about today? What about the power and authority of Jesus today? Is there something wrong that I do not have that power and authority? There are religious leaders and preachers who, I believe, try to claim that kind of power and authority. There is only one problem. They, like me, are not the Messiah! They, like me, are preachers who are supposed to witness to the power of the Lord, to the power of Jesus Christ to save and to heal. So, no longer is my ego threatened because I don't have the power or authority of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, neither do I hesitate to proclaim and bear witness to the amazing power of Jesus Christ.

I say this with caution, because if there is any power at all in my preaching or in my ministry it is because it comes from

the Lord, not from me. I, as a human being, have no more power than anybody else here.

And that comes to my third and final point on authority. You know, the Protestant Church in America, especially the Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and the Presbyterians are struggling to stay alive. Presbyterians, on the average are losing 40,000 members a year, either to another denomination or to oblivion. 40,000 members a year are lost! That's the equivalent of 180 Second Presbyterian Churches disappearing every year from our denomination. I believe that one of the reasons for this struggle is that these main line denominations have lost sight of the authority of Jesus Christ to whom we are called to witness. For a long time it has not been popular to preach and teach that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior. It has not been popular to preach and teach that we must face our own sin, confess to Christ and receive his forgiveness. It has not been popular to be called to act more like Christians. It has not been popular to be called to grow spiritually. We tend to be too attentive to our neighbor's shortcomings and sin, rather than attentive to our own shortcomings and sin.

For a long time we have shied away from the miraculous power, of Jesus Christ, the one who, by command can cast out demons and heal a broken man. We are afraid to even come to him and let his Good News of forgiveness and reconciliation to confront our secret hurts, our hidden frustrations, our pervasive selfishness and our protracted loneliness. I believe that my word to myself and to you is that we need to re-consider. We need to look again to Jesus, our

Messiah, as the one who can approach us despite our drawbacks, our ugliness, and our demons that possess us. Whether our demon is temper; whether our demon is depression; whether our demon is gossip; or whether our demon is some form of addiction. Whatever our demon, it is the malevolent spirit that bars us from becoming the whole, complete person that Christ has called us to be in His name. We need to try again to look to the Lord Jesus Christ for his healing love and touch.

We need to be back in that synagogue, witnessing the authority of our Messiah to teach us how to live and to heal us from our demonic tendencies. It is not really a new teaching, it is recovering the Gospel in our congregation and in our personal lives so that Jesus becomes a part of whom we are and how we live. As your pastor, I will continually witness faithfully to the love, grace and power of our Lord, Jesus Christ. As your pastor my pledge to you is to continue to pray that our lives shall continue to be transformed by the loving, healing power of God. My request to you is that you pledge to do the same for one another and me. Amen.

The Rev. Daniel E. Hale, D. Min.