

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

“The Authority of Jesus”

Luke 4:31-44

Three weeks ago we began a journey – an Epiphany journey, we said – that would take us from Christmas to Lent, from the cradle to the cross, and, in so doing, reveal to us once again that this baby born in Bethlehem is not only the Son of Man, he’s also the very Son of God, and is, indeed, the very Savior of the world.

In our Gospel lessons over the past three weeks, we’ve made a few stops along the way on this Epiphany journey. We’ve stopped on the banks of the Jordan where Jesus was baptized – we stopped at the wedding at Cana in Galilee where Jesus changed water into wine – and we stopped in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth where he pointed his listeners to the fact that the promise of the coming Messiah as contained in the scroll of Isaiah was being fulfilled in him. Today, our Gospel lesson takes us to Capernaum where Jesus is found teaching in the synagogue. Now we don’t know exactly what he was teaching that day but Luke says that whatever it was, the people were astonished because his word possessed authority.

The Greek word used for “authority” here means “absolute power.” You see, Jesus spoke with absolute power. In what he said, people found something completely unlike the usual cut-and-dried droning about tradition and the observance of manmade rules that they were used to hearing from the teachers of the law. There was little doubt in their minds that here was one with a message, with a teaching so wonderful, so impressive, so compelling that his listeners were literally astonished. And, as if to confirm that very authority, Jesus turned to a man there who was possessed by a demon and who knew who this Jesus really was and cast that demon out.

One might rightly ask, “Who speaks and acts with such authority? Who is it that when he speaks to people, his words burn within their hearts, and when he acts, even the demons obey him?” Certainly this Jesus is more than just a man. And, of course, we know that he was and that he is. We know he is none other than the very Holy One of God, the Son of the Most High, come into the world. For, you see, only God can speak and act with such authority – that’s why in his prologue to his Gospel, John called Jesus “the Word.” “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” And that Word, as the demon well understood, is God come to free the sinner from his sin, to liberate the prisoner from the power of death and to crush the devil underfoot. And while the world may not yet be as discerning as that demon was 2,000 years ago, it will when Jesus comes again as Judge and King. But you and I who have been made the very children of God through our baptism into Christ know who this Jesus is and what authority he has by grace through faith.

Recognizing that authority again today, that “absolute power” is why we’re here in worship today, it’s why we sit at Jesus’ feet in Bible study and listen to what he says, it’s not only why we listen but why we put into practice what he says, it’s why we commune with him in the Sacrament of his very body and blood, it’s why we seek ever more meaningful ways of serving

him by serving others, and it's why we respond to his call to be witnesses in this world with the words, "Here am I. Send me, send me."

Of course, the temptation is always there for us to forget the authority of Jesus in our lives for, as sinners, we want to exercise authority in our own lives, we want to call our own shots, and set the agenda for our own lives. You see, there's still a little Adam and Eve in all of us. And for that we all need to ask for his forgiveness and, in that forgiveness, to find his help in submitting to his authority once again – to not only recognize him as our Savior from sin but also as the Lord of our lives.

My friends, we are who we are by the grace of God given to us through faith in Christ and as we respond to his authority in our lives he gives us the power to live for him and to work in his name for the building of God's kingdom here on earth to his glory and honor. "Don't you know," Paul once said, "that you are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God." We honor God by not only recognizing Jesus' authority but also, and more importantly, by submitting to it in our lives day to day.

May God the Holy Spirit empower us once again today to see the authority of Jesus in His Word in our own lives and may He enable us to submit to that authority this coming week as we seek to witness to him in all that we say and in all that we do. And may Jesus' life be our life, His will our will, and his work our work, for his name's sake. Amen.