

A Different Kind of Teacher – January 28 – Mark 1:21-28

A DEA officer stopped at a ranch in Texas, and talked with an old rancher. He told the rancher, "Mister, I need to inspect your ranch for illegally grown drugs." The rancher looked him over and said, "That's fine, but don't go in that field over there.....," as he pointed out the location.

The DEA officer verbally exploded saying, "Look here, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me!" Reaching into his rear pants pocket, he removed his badge and proudly displayed it to the rancher. "You see this badge?! This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish, whenever I wish.... On any land! No questions asked or answers given! Have I made myself clear.....do you understand?!!!"

The rancher nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores.

A short time later, the old rancher heard loud screams, looked up, and saw the DEA officer running for his life, being chased by the rancher's big Santa Gertrudis bull.....With every step the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he'd sure enough get gored before he reached safety. The DEA officer was clearly terrified. The rancher threw down his tools, ran to the fence, and yelled at the top of his lungs..... "Your badge, show him your BADGE..... ! !"

<https://ls1tech.com/forums/texas-members/1396525-arrogance-authority-funny-story-joke.html>

As children, one of the hardest lessons we have to learn is how to respect authority. Power struggles between parents and children can be difficult, but at some point, children learn that they can't have everything the way they want.

As we grow and develop, our understanding of authority becomes second nature. After perhaps a few tantrums along the way, we learn to listen to our parents because they love us and want to keep us safe from harm. We learn to respect our teachers because they teach us how to understand the world around us. Part of living in community with others is coming to trust people with authority.

Unfortunately, we sometimes learn that not all our authorities have our best interests at heart. A recent development in the news has been an unfolding story about a doctor for the U.S. Olympics Team who has been convicted of taking sexual advantage of hundreds of young female athletes who were in his care. Many of the girls testified that they thought something wasn't right with how he treated them, but because he was a doctor, he believed him when he said his treatment was medically necessary. They trusted him, and he abused their trust for his own desires.

Our lessons from Deuteronomy and Mark have the theme of authority in common. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is teaching the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. He has been telling them about the role of the public leaders, the people who will be in authority over them. His discussion covered judges, kings and priests, and then our lesson from chapter 18 talks about the authority of prophets.

Back when Moses had received the Law at Mt Sinai, God had spoken to the Israelites, giving them the Ten Commandments. The people were afraid to hear the voice of God directly, so they begged Moses to be the mediator of God's word. The prophets who would follow Moses would be like him in that they too would mediate God's word to the people and proclaim God's will.

The prophets who came after Moses and proclaimed God's word and warned the people of God's displeasure weren't just random voices speaking up. They filled a particular office that had been established. They were divinely authorized and were given the power and authority to speak out to the people. The people were warned to heed the words of the prophet. They were to be taken seriously and to be honored. But as Israelite history has shown, the voices of the prophets were often not welcomed nor were they heeded.

As time passed in Israel's history, this text in Deuteronomy came to be interpreted not as merely referring to the entire prophetic line but instead was thought to picture one particular prophet who would come before the end of time, or at the time of the Messiah. Like Moses, this prophet would be a redemptive leader, a worker of miracles, a person of great authority, and a giver of laws. It is easy for us Christians to see how Jesus fits this description of a great prophet like Moses who was to come. But that's because we know the whole story. Those persons back in the first century didn't know who Jesus was, and their understanding came over time as his identity was revealed to them.

So let's look at the story from Mark's Gospel. In today's lesson we learn that the first act of Jesus' public ministry is to teach in the synagogue in the town of Capernaum. The people who hear him are astounded. Why? Because Jesus doesn't teach like the scribes. He teaches as one having authority.

The scribes were scholars. They spent their time studying the law, the Torah, and interpreting that law for others. The insights they received were based on their detailed study of scripture and learning what previous scholars had understood. Based upon their studies, they would draw conclusions and then present the information to the people. But Jesus was different. He spoke on behalf of God. He spoke like a prophet.

And this evident by not only his manner of teaching but by what comes next in the story. While Jesus is teaching, a man with an unclean spirit enters the synagogue. Immediately, the unclean or evil spirit recognized who Jesus was, and cried out, "What do you have to do with us, Jesus! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, you're the Holy One of God!"

In the ancient world, evil spirits were believed to be the cause of numerous physical and mental maladies. To be under the control of an unclean spirit was tragic because it caused one to be ostracized from the rest of society. No one wanted to be around a person categorized as unclean or having an unclean spirit for fear that the "uncleanness" would rub off.

Seemingly without effort, Jesus simply commanded the unclean spirit to shut up and get out of the man. With one parting seizure and a cry of defeat, the spirit left. Indeed the unclean spirit was correct about Jesus, because in fact, Jesus did come into the world to overthrow all those powers that would cause a person to be considered unclean and marginalized from the rest of society.

And this action by Jesus there in the synagogue cemented the assertion his hearers already made. This Jesus taught with authority. Not only did his teachings sound different than that of the scribes but his teachings exhibited power. He had the power to command others. Even the unclean spirits that existed merely to torment and keep people down were no match to this new teaching.

In our 21st century mindset, we may scoff at the idea of being possessed or controlled by an unclean spirit. This story seems to have little to do with our very rational lives here in Central Wisconsin. We don't hear of too many exorcisms happening around town. But let's think about this for a minute. There are indeed unclean powers that can assert control over us. We **do** allow things of this world to have authority over our lives.

Think about people who struggle with various kinds of addictions. Sometimes there are things that take hold of us and that threaten to control people just like you and me. Greed, pride, gambling, prejudice, pornography, materialism, revenge, any number of addictions, rage, feelings of entitlement. And many times, those powers that control us hurt not only us, but effect the people around us. Again, I refer to the Olympic Team doctor whose sexual perversion impacted the lives of hundreds of girls and young women.

I think each one of us here, if we give it some thought, can name at least one negative thing that has authority in our lives. And often these things have such a hold over us, we find it hard to rid ourselves of them. Sometimes the power of its authority over us is so strong, we may not want to give it up. But even when we do get the point of desiring to be free of the bondage of this unclean spirit, we often cannot rid ourselves of it on our own.

The good news is that Christ has come to defeat the powers that overwhelm us. He comes bringing liberation, to free us from the evil that binds us and controls us. His authority is indeed unique, because he comes with the authority of God. And he comes bringing to us the possibility of life altering change. His authority is always trustworthy. God wants all people to experience total healing and wholeness in their lives. God brings to us an authority that supersedes any other power that might assert control in our lives. God brings to us the power of transformation, of becoming something more than we could ever imagine for ourselves. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves who or what holds the authority in our lives? Is there something that has gotten beyond our control and has too much power in our lives?

Let us all look to God for healing in those places in our lives that have taken a negative toll on who we are. Let us pursue the healing and wholeness that God offers to each one of us. May it be so.