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The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
3 February 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Lk 4:31-44

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“Jesus was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed *authority*.” (Lk 4:31-32)

Two professors come to mind whenever I hear of Jesus preaching with authority.

First is Professor David Scaer,

who recommended that we listen to the most boring audio version of the Scriptures as possible—nothing by James Earl Jones or any dramatic performance.

He also would finish his sermons while he was already on his way back to his seat.

The second is Professor Norman Nagel, who I never studied under, but have heard the stories.

When he preached he would never look up—always eyes to the manuscript, no voice changes or inflections, or dramatic pauses. He just read what he wrote.

These two professors, one from each of our Synod’s seminaries, break every rule in the preaching handbook.

And yet these are two of the best preachers are synod has known.

Jesus also, most likely, did not preach like Billy Graham.

He didn’t make people laugh like Garrison Keillor,

or cry like Shakespeare.

He didn’t persuade people like Cicero,

and He certainly didn’t have any speeches written for Him like most presidents today.

In all likelihood, Jesus had a plain voice, a mild sense of humor,

and could tell a story about as well as the rest of us.

Jesus had no need to embellish His words, or pound the pulpit, or use whatever technology was available at that time.

Jesus preached and He taught, but it was different than the Scribes and Pharisees

(and Cicero, Reagan, and Graham),

for His word possessed authority.

Now, to be clear, power and authority are not the same.

Power comes from within: *talent, ability, skill, intelligence, creativity, and practice.*

But authority always comes from without—from somewhere or someone else.

You can’t make or create or practice or perfect it;

it’s always something *given*.

So when the people were *astonished at His teaching*,

it wasn’t because His rhetoric was so smooth, or His delivery so captivating—

it was because what He said was *true*.

And it wasn’t true because He really made you feel like it was true—

it was true whether you believed it or felt it or not.

Power requires force, coercion, manipulation, and embellishment.

You do what you must to get the outcome you desire.

But the man speaking from authority simply says and does what His Master tells him to do.

It's like saying, *"Take it or leave it, I just work here."*

So they were astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed authority.

Because authority is always *given*, Jesus says,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." (Mt 28:18).

God the Father, *maker of heaven and earth*, has given to His risen Son, Jesus, authority to access His power, to speak and act on His behalf.

Jesus, who always has been and always will be fully God of God and Light of Light, has authority to do and to say whatever the Father wills.

John says in his gospel,

"For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise"(Jn 5:19).

So when Jesus speaks, things happen.

Whether heavenly or earthly, spiritual or mundane—whatever Jesus commands happens.

And it happens because His words are the Father's words.

In today's reading, after they marvel at His words, Jesus shows what His words do:

first it was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon (4:33).

When the demon cried out, ***"Jesus rebuked him, saying,***

'Be silent and come out of him!'" (4:35)

And the demon left him lying there on the ground, having done no harm.

Then it was Simon Peter's mother-in-law, ***ill with a high fever*** (4:38).

Like the demon, ***Jesus stood over her and rebuked the fever.***

And just like that, ***the fever left her,***

and she immediately arose and began serving them.

And finally, *when the sun was setting*, all the sick and demon possessed came to Him, and He healed them all.

Now listen to their response:

"And they were all amazed and said to one another,

'What is this word? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!'" (4:36)

This Word is God's own word; and His word does what it says.

When He says, "Come out," the demons come out.

When He says, "be healed," Peter's mother-in-law gets out of bed and fixes a meal.

But Jesus came to cast out demons not just once, but once and for all.

He came not just to heal a high fever, but to cast out sickness and death for ever.

So Jesus says,

"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (4:43)

Jesus will not stop until this is accomplished.
 Every town, every village, every man, woman, and child—
 Jesus has come to bring the Gospel of His kingdom.

Now this Jesus, to whom *all authority in heaven and on earth have been given*,
 still speaks today.

Christ has called men to stand in His stead and to speak by His command this authoritative word.
 We call this the *Office of the Keys*, or, the *Office of the Holy Ministry*.

Jesus said,

***“The one who hears you hears Me,
 and the one who rejects you rejects Me,
 and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me”*** (Lk 10:16).

So the Father wills, the Son speaks, and it’s all heard through the mouth of an ordinary man.

The pastor has authority to speak what is already spoken by Christ in heaven.
 And with his words you can be certain—
 not because he’s so persuasive or eloquent, dynamic or talented—
 but because the words your pastor speaks are not his own, but Christ’s.

Luther would often say that the pastor is just the spoon of Christ—
 the instrument by which He feeds His gifts to you, His Church.

In that, the pastor is a servant—
 as we say in the absolution: *“a called and ordained servant of the Word”*.

As a servant, we pastors just work here.
 We give what Christ has given and say what He has said.

And when Christ speaks, things happen.
 When you hear the words of forgiveness, you can be sure they’re yours.
 Even if you don’t feel it, understand it; or think it’s too simple—
 nevertheless, it’s true—this Jesus has come *for you!*

Your demons are cast out,
 your plague of sin is removed,
 your debt is paid and you are free!

You are baptized.
 You are forgiven.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit