

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Last week a young man walked into a police department, dressed in full uniform, received his assignment for the day, and proceeded to the squad car. From there he and his partner patrolled the city of Chicago for about five hours before he was discovered. Not only was this young man not qualified to be a policeman, but he was only 14 years old. This episode caused quite a stir in the Midwest; at the very least security had been breached. While this young man meant no harm, it is amazing the cooperation given him and the authority that was assumed.

Having worked in sales and marketing I know the power of authority; and how assumption can walk a fine line. Though never acquired under false pretense, I often found authority was more freely given contingent on my clothing rather than on my credentials. For example, when acting as ambassador for the Chamber of Commerce in a town of 100,000, I noticed the moment I slipped into my uniform, a “red” jacket, I was considered a leader in the community. Authority was understood. An unspoken rule gave me the respect and consideration I may not have completely merited on my own. Although I did not walk in hypocritical heels, the title still seemed superficial.

These are not indicative of the authority we sense from today’s Gospel. Jesus does not wear a uniform, red or any other color. He does not walk with rigid posture or sport manicured nails. What Jesus ‘wears’ is something completely different – it can not be seen from the exterior but rather it comes from the inside. His message, his manner...everything about Him is new and invigorating... which **astounds** his listeners. I can’t put my finger on exactly what it is which caused the listeners to be so astounded. The significance of this word cannot go on unnoticed. In the Greek the word *astounded* literally means “blown out of one’s mind”. According to Brian Stoffregen, it comes from something that is so incomprehensible that one cannot fathom what has been experienced.”

Mark has no problem in understanding or describing the effect Jesus has on the people. Jesus radiates his undisputed authority over sin, death and the power of the devil. God in the flesh sweeps away every barrier, every obstacle, and replaces it with the gift of forgiveness, wholeness, and the promise of everlasting life.

Mark is so excited to share this good news it simply blow his mind. I understand why the gospel writer wants to get his listener’s attention because we, too, require a headliner like this once in a while. Living in a fast paced world we have become accustomed to getting everything NOW. We have limited time to hear what Mark so passionately wants share. So he takes us immediately to a setting where Jesus enters the synagogue and begins to teach.

Imagine yourself coming to the synagogue. Put yourself in the sandals of those who walk the streets of Capernaum; Picture dry and dusty roads, people walking everywhere on foot in the heat of the day. In the center of that city they gather in the house of God thirsting for the *power and presence of the Word*. Along comes an ordinary man...someone from a small town called Nazareth. Remember Nathanael asking “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” And Philip replies... “Come and see.”

The people come and see. They listen. When Jesus speaks, they cannot believe their ears. “For he taught them as one having authority... *and not as the scribes*.” The listeners are blown out of their minds...the message from Jesus is so incomprehensible they cannot fathom what they have just experienced.” When was the last time you felt completely blown away or simply could not fathom something?

I recently saw a movie which left me feeling somewhat like this. Clint Eastwood plays a character named Walt in the movie *Gran Torino*. Walt is a senior citizen, recently widowed, and living in a fast

changing suburb in the Midwest. He is a grumpy old racist who snarls at the Hmong woman rocking on her front porch next door. He chases pesty teens off his lawn and intervenes gang oppression...all the while using scare tactics like pointing his trigger finger at the delinquents.

Walt simply wants to be left alone.

It soon becomes evident this will not happen. As the movie progresses, so does the relationship between Walt and his neighbors, particularly the teenage girl Sue and her brother, Tao. The more involved Walt gets, the heavier the gang retaliates against them. His intervention brings consequences to that family of devastation and near death experiences. Though he resists, Walt eventually takes matters into his own hands when gang members taunt and threaten his neighbors one too many times.

Although Sue and Tao seemingly save Walt from his miserable existence with their patience and kindness, it is Walt, who, in the end, saves them. Ironically, though, it is the teens' compassionate words which enable Walt to do what he does without trepidation. Haunting memories of the Korean War and actions of a persistent young priest dovetail as Walt exhibits quick wit and strong nerve. Given his history of resentment, we, the viewers assume this violence will be impetus for shooting or the very least shutting up these thugs. Instead, we are offered a culmination of bitter sweet resolve. Without disclosing the ending, I will say, Walt does what most people can not fathom doing. Walking away from that movie I found it difficult to wrap my mind around what I had just seen.

I was left with a feeling similar to the heart throbbing sensation I get when I think of the sacrifice Jesus made for me.

Max Lucado tells us that if you or I were the only person on this earth, God would have sent Jesus to die just the same. God's love is so astounding I cannot fathom what it really means to be a child of God. I am overwhelmed when I inhale a starry night, walk barefoot on the beach, or feel the gentle breeze on my face. God loves us so much he gave us everything including his only Son.

In a few minutes the Junior Choir will sing "O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." Yes, indeed!! Jesus is the King, the Word made flesh, the Word around which we gather, the Word that "trumps any lesser spirit that would **claim power over us**". We have the written Word to guide us while the Holy Spirit intercedes. Today, I invite you to think about how much control you have given over to Christ. Is your Sunday world different from your Monday world? If Christ had total authority over your life what might your life look like today?