

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Mark 1:21-28

Grace to you and Peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come.
Amen.

Our readings this evening started off with Moses. Moses, even though it's the 18th chapter of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomy goes on for many more chapters, Moses is in the middle of his farewell speech to the people of Israel. He's been leading them for over 40 years. He put up with their shenanigans back in Egypt, he endured their bickering, back-biting, and whining when they were in the wilderness. He fed them, he saw that they were watered, and got them to the Promised land, TWICE, he got them there to the Promised land. And now, there they are the second time, they're at the border to the Promised land. So he has gathered the people together and he has reminding them of everything that they have gone through together, of all that they have been promised as well. This man is a leader, he is someone who knows what he is doing, he is a person who is speaking with authority.

Now according to my handy dandy *American Heritage Dictionary*, Authority: "**1a.** The power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command, determine, or judge. **2.** Power assigned to another one. **4a.** An accepted source of expert information or advice," and it goes on for several more. But, the one that I think is most applicable to our readings tonight: "**8.** Confidence derived from experience or practice; firm self-assurance." Because that sounds an awful lot like Jesus in the Synagogue as we heard in our gospel reading tonight. This reading from the Gospel of Mark takes place early on in Mark. Mark, chapter 1, it takes place actually relatively early in the chapter, about half way through the first chapter. Mark's a short gospel, it's only sixteen chapters all together (actually one of the confirmation students a couple of years ago told me he read the entire Gospel of Mark, he read the entire gospel in one hour. I think it was during a worship service because he didn't want to listen.) But it is a short gospel, it is the action-packed version of all four gospels. But our reading tonight is taking place early in the gospel, early in Jesus' ministry. As a matter of fact, just a few verses early he had just gotten some of his disciples. We went through that whole "come and follow me and I will make you fishers of people" and he was able to reel in Andrew and Simon and James and John, a couple sets of brothers.

And so they come to the fishing village of Capernaum, there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It's called the Sea of Galilee, we would probably really call it a nice little lake, but that's okay. It's there on the seas of Galilee and they go to a synagogue. A synagogue in Jesus' day is not a synagogue like what we know it today with the Jewish community around here. Back in Jesus' day, especially there in Israel, it was a place of learning. It was a place of teaching. It wasn't necessarily a place of worship because you had the temple. There in Jerusalem you could go to the temple, that's where you worshiped. That's where you made your sacrifices. The synagogues grew out of the time when the people were in exile, far away several hundred years earlier, in Babylon. When the temple was destroyed and they had no place to worship, they had no place to gather together. That's where the synagogues grew out of.

So Jesus is there in this local synagogue and he sits down and he starts to teach them. He reads them the scripture and then he starts to talk about it. He extrapolates, he interprets it for them, and the people are astounded. Because here's a guy with whom they

are apparently unfamiliar, but he's teaching the socks off of all the other scholars who are there in the synagogue. He is somebody who KNOWS what he's talking about. To put it in perhaps a bit more modern of terms, he's NOT simply a Talking Head. Jesus is to scripture, to use some television analogy, what Gil Grissom is to forensic science, or to use computer analogy, what Bill Gates is to computer software. Jesus really KNOWS his stuff and he shares his knowledge and he apparently shares it in such a manner that those to whom he is teaching are able to comprehend what he is saying. How many times have we gone to a Bible study, or maybe picked up a Bible commentary or listen to a sermon, only to be lost by the intelligence of the person who is speaking or writing. But Jesus put this to the people in a way that they can understand. Like the definition on authority, he does so with "*Confidence derived from experience or practice; firm self-assurance:*"

But what good does authority do us? Within the confines of faith, authority tells us what is right, what is proper, what is true. Authority tells us that Baptism is a good thing. Baptism, being washed by the waters of our baptism, is to be brought into the family of God. Baptism is that which brings us into the same family that this authoritative figure, this Jesus, is a part of. Baptism helps to binds us one to another. The authority of baptism is that physical daily reminder, Martin Luther said every morning as we stand and wash up, as we pour the waters to wash ourselves, we are reminded of the waters of our baptism. When we are wet, we are reminded that we have been washed clean of our sins. The authority of baptism.

Another thing this authority filled Jesus brings us is the celebration that we will have in a few minutes of the bread and the wine. The body and the blood, the Eucharist meal. Do this Jesus told his disciples, do this, Jesus continues to tell us today. Do this, in remembrance of me, do this, Jesus says because it's good for you. Do this, because in so doing, you will be spiritually strengthened. Do This, Jesus said. "He speaks as one who has authority!"

Too often, though, I think that as a believer, I think that I have all the answers, and I get rather snooty when I think somebody else is wrong. I came across a quote from C. S. Lewis, – I'm not exactly sure where it came from, but I think it kind of sums up the attitude that too often I have, thinking that my knowledge about a particular subject puts me in a better position than someone else. C. S. Lewis writes:

"If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual. The pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, of backbiting, the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me competing with the human self which I must try to become; they are the animal self, and the diabolical self is the worst of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig, who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it's better to be neither."

Moses, and Jesus. A couple of very good authorities. A couple of people who we should strive to emulate. A couple of folks to whom I think that I can't even hold a candle to, and yet , we know, we know because Jesus promised this that Christ is with us in all that happens to us. In all that we do, in all of the good things and all of the not so good things, which we call "sin." God loves us regardless. God calls us to strive to be good, to live in that divine love, to learn from that authority, knowing all the while that on our own we

never will get there. Still though, God calls us to do what is right because God knows that we are forgiven. We have the knowledge of our forgiveness on the best authority that we know, on the blood of the cross.

Amen.

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