**Authority**

**Matthew 8:1-13**

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

01.23.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I do not know if you pay attention to such things, but we live in what is being called the post-modern age. This applies to us because post-modernism has affected theology and theological thought. In fact, many people do not know that they are thoroughly post-modern, yet it is plainly evident that they are.

I guess I should explain a bit about post-modernism. For example, in post-modernism, instead of speaking about faith or religion, people say they are religious or spiritual. Being spiritual or religious is all about the experience and feelings. There is no specific truth for the post-modernly spiritual. Post-modern spiritualists seek and savor any experience they desire. Post-modern thought pushes the idea of being inclusive and tolerant of just about any beliefs.

There is no objective truth in the post-modern mind. This means there is no authority that can speak from outside us and say, “this is what it means to be a believer in… whatever.” Instead, the individual is their own authority, and what might be truth to one, might not be truth to another, and both are right and equally valid.

The watchword of the post-modern way of looking at religion is tolerance. Jim Leffel and Dennis McCallum, authors on a Christian website have this to say about it. Not too long ago, intolerance meant rejecting or even persecuting practitioners of other religions. Not any more. Now, intolerance means questioning the validity of any aspect of another's religion. To the majority of Americans below fifty today, questioning the truthfulness of another's religious views is intolerant and morally offensive. This prohibition against differing with other's viewpoints is postmodern.

While intolerance is the watchword, there is a glaring inconsistency. They are intolerant of any form of Christianity which claims to know truth, or which claims there is the possibility of false doctrine. What this means is that under the banner of inclusiveness, postmodern thinkers claim they want everybody to believe whatever they want. In actuality though, they are willing to include all but one group – those of us who are committed to biblical authority.

How does the idea of inclusiveness, that is, accepting of all religions and all different beliefs as equally true and valid, compare with what God says through Peter in his first sermon? Peter makes the claim that all religions except Christianity will not lead to heaven. (Acts 4:11-12) “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

What does Jesus’ declare about other ways to heaven? “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus also said, (Mt 10:37) “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

In our post-modern thinking, and we are all guilty of it to some extent, we do not like authority, we question it. We especially dislike and question any authority if it goes against what we have experienced, or what we feel inside ourselves to be true. This becomes especially true when we are called upon on something where our personal feelings and a supposed statement of truth are in contradiction.

In our Old Testament reading, the leper Namaan, commander of the army of the king of Syria, goes to Elisha for healing. Elisha does not personally come out to speak to the man. Instead, he sends out a servant to tell Namann to go and wash seven times in the Jordan river. Namaan throws a tizzy fit, thinking this is ridiculous. But his servant says, (2 Kgs 5:13) “My father, if the prophet had bid you to do some great thing, wouldn’t you have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?”

Namaan did not like the simple instructions, he did not want to trust the word of a servant sent from the prophet. It should have been – more. He is the commander of the army of Syria. He wanted to see more authority than that, he expected something greater.

In our Gospel lesson, the leper comes to Jesus stating that if it is Jesus’ will He can heal him – cleanse him of his leprosy. He comes to Him for he recognizes Jesus’ authority over disease. Jesus touches him, stating quite simply, “I will; be clean.” His authority over the disease is plainly shown as the man is immediately healed. But Jesus also shows His submission to the authority of the Torah by telling the man, “go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” Jesus shows His submission to the authority of God’s Law which was established in regard to cleanliness and leprosy.

Next comes the Centurion who wants his servant to be healed by Jesus. Jesus offers to come to the Centurion’s home and heal him. However, the Centurion recognizes Jesus authority, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but l only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

This man recognizes Jesus’ authority over the disease that is ravaging his servant. In fact, he recognizes that Jesus’ authority over the disease need only be spoken and the servant will be healed. Jesus heals simply by speaking, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.”

Incredible miracles are done in our text. Twice the divine power of God almighty is glimpsed in the work of Jesus. His authority over sin, which brings on the very ravages of disease, is displayed by the miracles of healing a leper and a paralytic.

Dear friends, we all balk at authority. We ignore the authority of traffic laws – rolling through stop signs and ignoring speed limits. Nor do we like the authority of God’s laws – we all have those which we like to think do not apply to us, at least not 100% of the time.

What it is, is that we do not like others to tell us right and wrong, even when deep down in our hearts we know it to be true.

We also question authority even when it doesn’t require anything of us, except to believe. Too often we are like Namaan, questioning the very simple things by which God would heal us and bring us His gracious goodness.

Couldn’t God deal with us himself? Instead He sends us His servants, stewards of God’s authority. And they give us silly instructions – be washed with a sprinkling of water, listen to the word of my servant, eat this bread and drink from this cup – there must be more impressive things He can do.

There must be something more impressive than Jesus dying on the cross, right? Who hasn’t thought that we must do more than God has already done? What authority could there be in the suffering and death of a man on the cross? The power of that crucifixion comes from the submission of Christ to authority. He fulfilled the Law that we do not fulfill. He submits, without reservation, to the authority of Him with whom He is equal, calling Him Father and obeying His will. He gives up His authority over us, to take our sins into Himself and dies for them. His innocent suffering and death gives Him authority over sin and death, it give authority over all the consequences of sin, such as leprosy and paralysis.

Christ has authority over your sin and death and wills that you also become clean. He desires that it be done for you as you believe.

So it is, that by His authority, with simple water, by a word from His servant, and in a meal of bread and wine, Christ grants to you healing and life.

He changes your heart from one of doubt to one of believing.

His authority gives you confidence in this life and into the next.

Dear friends, we do not believe this just because it is our choice. This is not just one of many possible religions, all of which have “truth.” Jesus alone is The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

Jesus is the only One who gives life and salvation, and only in the manner which He prescribes. Dear friends, there is no other name that has such authority.

Blessed are you in Jesus’ name, unto life everlasting. Amen.