

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
January 28, 2024

First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

Rev. John F. Koerner

Mark 1:21-28

They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.

(Mark 1:22 N.R.S.V.)

Authority

There was a certain High School teacher who injured his back and had to wear a plaster cast around the upper part of his body. It was form fitted, fit under his shirt and wasn't noticeable at all. The first day of school he still had the cast on. He looked at his class roster and realized he'd been assigned to the toughest students in school.

He walked into the classroom, which was already rowdy and noisy. All the students were talking and laughing and either acted like he wasn't there or looked at him with disdain, daring him to say something, anything. The teacher walked over and opened a window as wide as possible and then started working at his desk. Several times, a strong breeze made his tie flip up into his face. Finally, he reached over, picked up the stapler and stapled the tie to his chest in three places and then continued working.

The class immediately quieted down and he didn't have any problems with discipline that entire year.

(The Pastor's Story File (Saratoga Press, P.O. Box 8, Platteville, CO, 80651; 970-785-2990), October 2000.)

Our lesson from Mark is about authority. Jesus had authority. Mark tells us that when Jesus preached his very first sermon, people were amazed because he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

It might be helpful here to talk a little bit about the different kinds of authority.

First there is borrowed authority. The scribes had some authority, but it was a second hand authority. When they taught, they were always quoting some other authority. Sometimes they quoted Moses or one of the prophets. Sometimes they would quote famous Rabbis. But they did not say, "This is true because I said it is true." That was what Jesus said.

Second there is position authority. There was a time when doctors, teachers, and pastors were ceded a lot of authority because of their more extensive knowledge and training. That is still somewhat true today, but less so than it used to be.

I was talking with one of my nephews about gun control. It was a rather humbling experience for me. As a pastor I am used to people giving some weight to what I say. Of course, I am usually talking about church and God. In that area people don't necessarily agree with me, but they give my words some weight.

So in talking about gun control, I was stepping outside of my area of expertise. Suddenly I had no authority at all. And then there is that whole family thing. No one can shoot you down like family can.

My nephew was not at all impressed with what I had to say.

Third there is a certain authority we grant to those who are older. When we are teenagers, we may think that our parents and grandparents don't know anything. But the older we get the more we recognize that old people have been through a lot and we listen more to what they have to say.

Billy D. Strayhorn tells about a woman named Mrs. Davis. Mrs. Davis celebrated her 103 birthday while he was serving this one church. She was one of those faithful members who was there every Sunday, unless she was sick or it was too cold for her to get out. Mrs. Davis was deaf as a stump but had a radiant smile for everybody. The kids just loved her.

One Sunday, Strayhorn relates, we had one of the holy moments when everybody just stopped to listen. One of the little girls stood up in the pew next to Mrs. Davis and hollered in her good ear, "Mrs. Davis, if you can't hear the sermon or the music, why do you still come to church?"

You could have heard a feather hit the floor. All eyes were on Mrs. Davis. With one of those radiant grins, Mrs. Davis patted the little girl on the hand and said, "Well, honey, I want just everyone to know whose side I'm on." Strayhorn says, "We could have gone home right then. Mrs. Davis spoke with the voice of experience and the authority of her years."

Fourth there is the authority of success. When Bob Huggins talks about basketball, people listen. When Nick Saben talks about football, people give great weight to his words.

However, when Jesus spoke, he had authority on a whole different level. He spoke with the power of the Holy Spirit. He spoke with the word of God.

The first thing I want you to note about that is that people responded. People were astonished, but they were also drawn to Jesus. That is the power of God.

In a world full of lies, we need that authority, that truth more than ever.

In the movie, *Secondhand Lions*, Walter's uncle Garth tells him about amazing and thrilling adventures that he had with his other uncle Hub. He tells about how they were recruited into the French Foreign Legion and how they fought in Africa. He mentions about Hub's lost love, but

refuses to share that part. Walter must ask his uncle Hub about that.

In time Walter works up the nerve to ask his uncle Hub about his lost love, Jasmine. Hub resists at first, but finally relents and tells the story.

After it is over, Walter says, "Those stories about Africa, about you, they're true, aren't they?" Hub tells the boy, "Doesn't matter."

Walter disagrees. "It does too. Around my mom all I hear is lies. I don't know what to believe."

That is where we find ourselves today. Powerful people and powerful organizations spend millions of dollars trying to manipulate us into believing one thing over another.

Have you noticed how many public opinion polls there are these days? And politicians often base their votes on what those polls show. Now maybe that sound like a good thing, but there is a fatal flaw there. Ask me how to achieve peace in the Middle East and I can give you my opinion. But I have absolutely no expertise in that area at all.

Most likely the opinion I give you is based on what I have heard from my favorite news source. Maybe that news source has some expertise and maybe not. Maybe they're more interested in getting me to believe a lie. I don't know, I have absolutely no first hand expertise.

I was taught in high school that the way our government is supposed to work is that we elect wise people to congress. We elect dedicated people who will do the hard work and necessary research to find out what the best solutions are. Our elected officials are not supposed to be take the easy way out and simply vote what is most popular. Think about how many times in the Bible the majority of the people got it wrong. Often God was working with the remnant, the few, not the majority.

Lies are everywhere in our world. Ignorance pretending to be truth is everywhere. We desperately need to hear truth. And that is the one thing that only Jesus can really give us.

Here is the next thing about that. Sometimes the truth shakes us up.

Look back with me to our text from Mark. Jesus speaks and the demon or unclean spirit is the only one there who recognizes him. The good church people of the day are shaken up. They don't know what to think. Yet, they cannot deny that Jesus has the power when he casts out the demon.

The good church people of that long ago day did not go to church expecting to be shook up. They went expecting to hear some familiar message, some polite platitudes. Instead they encounter fire. It shakes them up. It shakes them up because if what Jesus is telling them is true, they need to change their ways and their attitudes.

Yet remember this. What Jesus has to say to us is always ultimately good news. So if you come to church and hear something that you disagree with or something that shakes you up, stop and

consider that this may be the Lord speaking to you.

Sometimes God gives us a hard truth. But always, it is for our good. For nobody loves you and wants what is best for you like God does. Sometimes that means being shook up.

Let us pray. Amen.