

Mark 1:21-28

Epiphany 4; January 28 & 29, 2024

Auctoritas. Do you, have it? In ancient Rome, *Auctoritas* was the general term that was used for those who have a certain level of prestige in society. It was their clout, their influence, their ability to get things done, their *authority*. Whether they got their *auctoritas* through their money, their military influence, or through their words – they could get things done. Today, in our text, Jesus is revealed to have more *auctoritas* than any of them.

We can see that in our readings for today. In our First Lesson, Moses tells the people of Israel, **“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”**

(Deuteronomy 18:15). God will give him *auctoritas*. The writer to the Hebrews shows that Jesus has more *auctoritas* than Moses. **“Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses.”** (Hebrews 3:3) In our Gospel Lesson that he is the THE PROPHET that was foretold by Moses, whose glory far surpasses that of Moses. On this Sabbath Day in Capernaum, Jesus is about to show them that he has more authority than anyone of anytime. His Word has AUTHORITY above all.

Have you ever noticed how, when someone speaks with authority, there will be those who hear and listen to what that person says. They will listen to him, even though he might be wrong. There was a man named Aristotle who lived about 400 years before Jesus was born. He was a brilliant man. He was regarded as the greatest thinker of his time. His knowledge extended over things like philosophy to science. He brought new theories to the world of his day. He had become highly respected. One of the theories that he had taught was if someone took two objects that were of the same volume (size) but different mass (weight) and drop them, the one that was heavier would hit the ground first. It makes sense, doesn't it?

For centuries, people believed that Aristotle was right. As the story goes, since he was so highly regarded and respected, no one challenged his theory until a man named Galileo, who lived almost 2,000 years after Aristotle. How could Aristotle be wrong? His words and theories carried a tremendous amount of *auctoritas*. Legend has it that in 1589 Galileo asked some of the best professors to meet him at the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy. Once they were there, Galileo climbed the eight stories to the top of the tower. He leaned over the top of the tower and he dropped two objects of the same size but of different weights. One was one pound. The other was ten pounds. Which one hit the ground first? They both did. Aristotle was wrong. Even it was said that there were still some professors who wouldn't accept that Aristotle was wrong, Galileo gained *auctoritas* that day.

When Jesus arrived at the synagogue in Capernaum, he was about to show the world who really had *auctoritas*. Mark tells us: **“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”** Jesus was just beginning his ministry. This reading from Mark picks up where we ended last week. Jesus was beginning to gather his disciples to follow him. Since he was a new teacher in town, they asked Jesus to teach that day. We don't know what Jesus preached that day. Mark doesn't tell us. He does tell us how the people reacted. They immediately recognized that there was something much different with the words that Jesus spoke.

So, what might they have heard on a regular Sabbath Day? The teachers of the law focused their teaching on what you had to do to make yourself acceptable to God. For example, God had given the Old Testament believers rules and regulations about the Sabbath Day to help them remember the Sabbath Day was to be about “Rest.” God wanted his people to take time and rest and focus on Him that day. God wanted to remind us his people that there was a Messiah that was coming that would bring eternal rest for his people.

Instead, they may have heard different interpretations on what constituted working on the Sabbath Day. They may have heard someone tell them that could only walk 3,000 feet during the whole Sabbath Day. They might have heard someone tell them about how they needed to wash their dishes to prepare for the Sabbath. They might hear how long of a hem they could have on their clothing. You might hear about how some teacher in the past had to say on certain topics. They may have heard words that talked about how the people were to behave, but they didn't offer any salvation. There were no words of comfort and hope. They did not hear about the awesome and amazing Grace of God.

So, when Jesus sat down in the teacher's chair that Saturday, they heard words that were so different than they were used to hearing. Every other teacher cited their sources, appealed to human authority, and repeated the teaching about a god who demands that we climb the ladder to attain his righteousness rather than the God who comes to us to save us. Jesus did not need to do that. Instead, he teaches the Scriptures as if he is the original writer. Instead, they heard Jesus **"proclaiming the Good New of God."**

The people were not the only ones listening that Sabbath Day. The Devil was listening also. Mark tells us: **"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"** Technically, the words that the Demon spoke are true. That is exactly what Jesus had come to do. Yet, he spoke those words to try to turn the people away from Jesus. He wanted to put fear into the hearts of people. So, what does Jesus do? **"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.**" Jesus had come to speak with authority. The Devil was simply making noise. So, Jesus sends him away.

On that day, Jesus showed everyone how much *auctoritas* he had. No one can stand up to the words of the almighty God – not even the Devil himself. It worked. **"The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."**

May we be amazed by the authority of Jesus. May we keep in mind the words of the final hymn we will sing today:

**O Church, arise and put your armor on;
hear the call of Christ our captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
in the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth
we'll stand against the devil's lies;
an army bold whose battle cry is love,
reaching out to those in darkness.
Amen.**