

With Authority

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, January 29, 2012

As children we learn to distinguish between our parents different voices of authority. For instance: I remember my mother calling to me to come in at dinner time, she would yell across the street to the school play yard, "Greg, come home it is dinner time." I learned early on that dinner tasted better when it was hot and fresh so I would immediately run home, leaving my friends to finish the game without me. Then there were those times when I would just hear my father say in a stern voice, "Greg, come here." I learned early on that this usually meant that I had done something wrong but not so bad that I needed to worry about it – maybe I had not cleaned the dinner dishes properly or my room was still a mess and the authority in my father's voice was, "You better get this done properly and now." The times when I would hear my mother or father say, "GREGORY!" I knew that I was in big trouble. I might have been caught in a lie or I had broken something of value and tried to hide it. Our parents have authority over us and it does not matter how old we are, we will always be our parents children. Their voices continue to cause us to remember their authority (even from the grave).

Authority is a word that has a variety of applications in our lives. There is the authority of a police officer who stops us for a traffic violation. There is the voice of the firefighter who when he shouts, "Evacuate the building!" causes us to run for safety. The voices

of our teachers bring an authority that causes us to study and work hard to improve our understanding. During this time of political debates we come to see a deeper meaning of authority as words spoken years ago come back to haunt would-be presidential hopefuls. True authority is found in those whose actions match their words. In today's scripture readings God's word points to this understanding of authority.

Just as at creation God spoke a word and that word became a physical reality so the prophet that God sends will speak and it will find meaning and relevance in our lives. Jesus enters the synagogue and teaches. This is followed immediately by Jesus performing a physical manifestation of God's word by casting out a demon that was in the middle of this small community of faith in Capernaum. God's authority, present in the prophets of God and in the Son of God, is one of consistency in word and deed.

When the writer of the gospel of Mark emphasizes that Jesus is one who teaches with authority, the community of faith that is seeking to follow the way of Jesus is challenged to embrace this claim. Our authority to exist and live together as the church comes from the authority of Jesus. God's living Word as contained in the One whom we proclaim Lord and Savior seeks to create of us a living manifestation of that word in and through us. Just as God's word came to the prophets and the prophets in turn spoke that word to the people so God's word comes to us through Jesus seeking not only to transform our lives but also making us part of God's word. As I shared before we are a living message of God to the people of this community and beyond.

It is important for us to note that in both the reading from Deuteronomy and the Gospel According to Mark, God's word does not come into a perfect community. In both

instances God's word reveals forces that are present and that work contrary to what God wills and intends. In Deuteronomy God's word comes to some who do not believe. There are even those within the community who will seek to speak a word in opposition to God's word and members of the community will be tempted to follow those words instead of God's word. In the Gospel reading we hear of a member of the community who had an unclean spirit that sought to silence Jesus. Jesus not only had words of rebuke for the unclean spirit, he also had the authority to remove that spirit from the community. Just as I mentioned earlier, God's word is a creative word – it is not stagnant, it is a word spoken with a purpose to create what is very good and very wholesome. God's word can be a destructive word as it seeks to establish God's kingdom in the lives of people – it seeks to remove all that blocks and thwarts what God is intending to do.

All of this is to say that God's living Word, Jesus Christ, comes to us, to our community of faith, each time we are together seeking to make of us a community of God's creation. The funny thing about authority is that while we might recognize it we do not always respect it or embrace it. The times I choose to not run home for dinner, but rather finish the game with my friends, I learned that dinner got cold and it didn't taste good – there were even times when I got home so late that I totally missed dinner and spent the rest of the evening hungry. Worse yet, there are those who hear the cry of a firefighter and think to themselves, "It is only a fire drill; I'll take my time." Only to find themselves minutes later in a burning building.

In Jesus Christ God is calling to us to embrace his Word. To allow that word to work within us casting out those things about us that have nothing to do with the kingdom of God or that work against God's good work. God is seeking to shape his people into a community that is prepared and ready to spread his word to all people and nations; to be part of God's creative movement that seeks to speak to and shape each one's life into the beautiful and marvelous creation God intended from the start. Welcome Christ into our life together; welcome Jesus into your life and allow God to remold you and make you into something beautiful for the kingdom.