

SERMON : "The Authority of Jesus"

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, whose touch can heal the broken places of life, touch us today. God of peace, whose spirit of peace can quiet our spirits of confusion and despair reassure us today. Forgiving God, whose call to repentance promises grace upon grace, place your mercy in our souls today. You who heal the sick and liberate the imprisoned, who bring justice in the midst of oppression and strength in the midst of weakness, pour out your spirit of power upon us today. Open our hearts to new faithfulness, redirect our waywardness, and hold us gently in your goodness. We confess our need to you, and we turn to you with hearts filled with hope, remembering the promises you have made to us. May your name be glorified in us and through us. We ask it through Christ Jesus, your only begotten son, he who is our Lord and our Saviour, our brother and our friend. Amen

DEUTERONOMY 18:15-20

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God anymore, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak - that prophet shall die."

MARK 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and

they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Today I want to remind you about who God is and who Jesus is.

This may seem like a strange topic; after all we here are Christians or at least we try to be, and we know a lot about both God and about Jesus. Yet, let's listen to what the scriptures say today and consider what you believe and who you believe as you strive to walk in the way of God, the way of truth, faith, and obedience.

The simple fact is that many Christians often approach God and we often relate to God, without any real thought about who He is.

We pray to God as we would talk to a loving Parent who cannot deny their children anything that they want; and we call upon God as if He was a storekeeper. A storekeeper whose job it is to give to all who ask the kind of blessings that we both need and desire.

That is good as far as it goes, God **is** like a loving Parent, and God **does** give us those blessings we both need and desire, but, having said this, our knowledge of God often does not go far enough.

Familiarity with the giving and forgiving side of God has, in some senses, bred a kind of ignorance.

We tend to forget the sheer size of God.

We tend to forget the awesome power of God.

We tend to forget the absoluteness of God, and all too many of us forget what the bible calls the beginning of wisdom. We forget the fear of God.

The Fear of God is not very fashionable today.

Many of us have come to believe that Hell is simply a metaphor, a description of the pain & suffering we experience here & now. Others have convinced themselves that God's judgements are always good ones; good in the sense that God will not punish us for our sins or make us pay for our transgressions if we believe in Him and in Jesus. This message is sometimes called the Good News Gospel.

Almost all of us have become so familiar with God's mercy, that we have forgotten the significance of that mercy. We have forgotten that God is to be feared and respected. We have forgotten that with God there is judgement. We have forgotten the demanding Holiness of our God, and as a result, we have become foolish while thinking ourselves to be wise.

Over and over again the scriptures say: **The fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom.**

Think about it! **The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.**

In the reading from Deuteronomy today Moses reminded Israel of one of its earlier encounters with God's awesome power and presence.

He reminded the people of how, as a result of their encounter with God at Mount Horeb, they had asked God to appoint him as a prophet and promised to obey all that God told him to tell them.

There at the foot of the mountain where the elders and all the leading men of the tribes of Israel had gone to wait for Moses to bring them the Word of God, they had heard God's voice come out of the darkness while the entire mountain blazed with fire, and they had become afraid.

In their fear the people had said to Moses:

"Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks to him. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer. Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey."

And Moses had said in reply:

"The Lord heard what you spoke to me and the Lord has said to me: 'I have heard what this people said to you. Everything that they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!'"

Moses also said to them:

"Do not be afraid: God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

The truth about God is that He has authority and He has power.

And the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God is with us to keep us from sinning.

To their credit the people of Israel feared God.

When the people of Israel saw the power of God, a power revealed in the smoke and the cloud, a power revealed in the plagues upon Egypt, and in the destruction of the armies of Pharaoh, they feared, and they were thankful to God.

And when the people of Israel heard God's voice and came out of the darkness and the fire at Mount Sinai, they again feared him, and God approved of that fear.

And God, having approved of that fear, in His kindness appointed Moses as the one to speak for Him to his people. He appointed Moses as a mediator, as a prophet, as one who was to proclaim all His words to the people so that they might obey those words and live.

Living, and living well, is what our faith is all about.

But who can meet God face to face and live?

Even Moses himself could only listen to His voice, and even Moses, that Holy man, when he desired to see God, could only be given a glimpse of God's back, because to look at God face to face is to die.

God's goodness is so tremendous; his Holiness so total that no evil can exist near it, As the Sun gives its light for us to see but blinds us if we look directly at it, so, God is so strong and so good that we cannot meet Him face to face in this life and survive.

Thus, Moses was made the spokesman for God. He was made the prophet of God. He was a man with God's authority, because Israel needed such a prophet if it was to hear the word of God and live as God wanted and desired them to live.

We too need a prophet, if we are to hear the word of God and live the life He intends. and God, in His mercy towards us, has given us such a prophet.

And as we heard today in Deuteronomy, He promised through Moses to raise up another prophet like Moses from among us.

The word of God to Moses, the word meant for us was this:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything that I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account."

Jesus is that prophet.

He came so that we might hear the word of God, and be able to meet God through him, and live.

When He first walked upon the face of this earth, the very first time He spoke in public, at the synagogue in Capernaum, the people recognized His authority. They understood that He was special, that He did not teach like others, and they were amazed by Him. They began to suspect that He was the promised prophet and within a very few days they called Him that, their Messiah.

Jesus had the authority of God, the authority of a prophet and as that first account of Jesus' ministry also shows us, demons immediately recognized that authority and they responded to His command to depart from those that they afflicted. They called Jesus: "**The Holy One of God**".

Evil listened to Jesus.

Evil fled at the command of Jesus.

Evil feared Jesus.

Who do we respond to? Who do we listen to? Who do we fear?

Many of us listen to false prophets. We listen to those who tell us over and over again that God is not to be feared, and that we can do this thing or that thing, and not worry about the consequences.

We listen to those who tell us half truths and outright lies and that we do not need to obey every word of His Son, or that we do not need to believe in Him to be saved.

We listen to those who tell us that we do not need the church that Jesus established through Peter, and that we can please God and be saved even when we stay at home and mock those who strive to be faithful by worshipping in God's house.

We listen to those who tell us God does not judge his children, even though the Scriptures clearly reveal that God judges those He loves.

Some of us are like those at Corinth; those whom Paul rebuked.

We listen to people who speak of new truths, and when we hear their words about the spirits around us or about how we do not die and get raised, but instead are reincarnated. We feel as we listen to this stuff that we have encountered a new and better wisdom and we allow this so-called knowledge to blind us to the word that Jesus not only taught, but also demonstrated.

Jesus is the Holy One of God.

He is God's Son, and He came to show to us what we cannot see without His help.

He came to show us how to please God.

He came to speak God's word to us; a word that gives life when obeyed, but promises death when ignored.

Who do we fear?

Who do we respond too?

Who do we listen to?

Jesus has the authority of God.

He is our prophet and our mediator.

He is the one who allows us to meet God and yet live.

He is the word of God's uncompromising love; a love that is both tender and compassionate, and tough and strict.

Do not allow anyone to deceive you.

We can be friends of Jesus.

Jesus can and does dwell in all those who sincerely call upon His name, and His love. The love of God is meant to set us free.

But remember as well that the love Jesus proclaimed is Godly love.

Let us not be soft-minded about God.

God is to be feared.

Do not listen to the false prophets; those who tell you that love will forgive all, and that your soul is safe no matter what you believe or do.

The word of God that has come to us through Jesus is the word that has always been proclaimed "Repent and believe in the good news of God's kingdom" Repent and believe; and all will go well with you for God, the God to be feared and respected, so spoke through Moses, and through Jesus our Saviour and our Lord.

AMEN

Let us pray.

We bless You O Lord for Your power and Your might and for how You care to use Your authority over all things for good instead of ill. We turn to You, O Lord, at this time because we can trust You to do what is right. Help us, we pray, to be like You; people who build rather than destroy, who cure rather than infect, who love rather than hate.

Lord, keep our minds and our hearts fixed on the example of Jesus Christ, our ears and our eyes focussed on the word you speak and write for our good. Awaken within us the awareness of the authority You have given us to act in Your name. When we work, help us to do it by Your power, when we speak, to do so with Your wisdom, when we step forth, to do so in the fullness of prayer and the presence of your Spirit.

We pray Lord, today, for all those in the world who are given earthly authority for the sake of others. We think of doctors and all the care-givers who are charged with the task of healing, of judges who must decide what is just, of rulers who must care for their people, and of teachers who must nurture their students. We pray Lord that they may seek Your wisdom before acting, and that You would bless them with the insight and the power and the will to do good.

We pray particularly today for those in hospital, in nursing homes and are at home alone. May they feel your presence with them.

Father, You sent Jesus to take upon himself our burdens and to replace them with his yoke, the yoke that is gentle and easy. We pray today for those who are burdened and afflicted. Help us as a church family to minister unto them and to grace them with the comfort of Your Spirit. We especially pray today for those who are bound by the demons of fear, of deceit, of hopelessness, and of despair. We also lift before you those people who are upon our hearts who face grief and sorrow; who struggle in the courts and with the legal systems of our world and those who face poverty and financial oppression.

Bless us, O Lord, your church, with the power shown by Jesus.

Make us as caring and as effective as our Lord Jesus Christ compels us to be. We ask it in His name, praying as he taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead

us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and may God's Word direct your every step. May God's Spirit sustain you in every act, and may God's Living Love fill your every moment, both now and forevermore. Amen