

# **Author - Author!**

**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**

**Mark 1:21-28**

January 29, 2012

Community of Joy Lutheran Church

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

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I. Have you ever been to a play or a reading (or some such event) and the audience was so overwhelmed by the quality of the writing of the piece that they stood as one and shouted, “Author, author!”? The people were so moved by the work that they want to “feast their eyes” on the talented person who created such a masterpiece, and show their appreciation (normally through applause and whistles and hoots, and whatever). We realize that the author is the one responsible for the fine work. And, believe it or not, our desire to appreciate the author (because she or he produced this work) makes us think that they derive some form of “authority” over that work.

A. Did you ever realize before that the word “authority” has, at its core, the word “author?” One form of authority comes from being the person (or deity) that wrote, or influenced the writing of, a certain work. Let’s define this word before we go any further. Authority is defined as: one that is invested with power; an accepted source of expert information or advice; one who has

power to influence resulting from knowledge or experience. Why are we even concerned with this word “authority?” It is intimately connected to the gospel text for today from Mark, chapter 1. It says, “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).

B. It was the sabbath, and Jesus (as usual) went to the synagogue to worship. He not only went there to worship, he went there to teach. Now, let’s consider the fact that Jesus was a carpenter. He was not a priest, a scribe, a Sadducee, or a Pharisee. He was not one of the people who would normally be allowed to teach in the synagogue. However, for some reason they let Jesus teach. Most probably the synagogue leaders thought, “He’s just going to say some things that he has heard in his upbringing. We most likely won’t hear anything new, and we probably will not be impressed with what he has to say to us. We’re just letting him speak because he is our guest today. We’re just being nice because we think God would want us to be nice.” Well, guess what? Mark says, “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). Let’s think about that word “astounded.” It doesn’t just mean “surprised,” or “mildly impressed” - these people of the synagogue (leaders and regular folks as well) “were astounded.” “Astounded” means: astonished; amazed. It’s a pretty “heavy” word. It means that the folks there that day probably had their jaws drop to the floor (so to speak). This word “astounded” means the folks were probably saying things like,

“Wow! Where did this guy come from and where did he get the ability to teach with such authority?” They weren’t used to someone teaching in this manner, as evidenced by the remainder of that sentence from Mark that says, “... and not as the scribes.” They were used to the teachings of the scribes - which was probably informative, but not astounding. They did not preach with such authority. They had to admit that this Jesus was different. Some liked that fact and others were perplexed by it. Some wanted to hear more and others wanted to shut this guy up.

C. There are several kinds of authority. One is authority that is given to a person because of his or her title, or by the law or other rules. Another authority comes from knowledge. If you know a lot about any particular subject (like fixing cars) - others will look to you as an authority on that subject. There is also an authority based on relationships. They are the people you listen to and respect because of the kind of people they are. They are someone you trust. Jesus had all of those kinds of authority, and a special authority bestowed upon him as the Son of God. His relationship to God certainly gave him some insights that no human could have had. Those who followed Jesus would say that there was just something about the things he said, and the way he said those things. And there was truly something about the way he did things - the way he lived his life. He was setting a perfect example for the disciples (and us) to follow. Jesus is an authority for us, because from him we can learn how to live and act, and become closer to God and one another.

D. These people realized that Jesus taught in a different manner. He taught as one whose authority resides in himself, in his own identity (“not as the scribes”). Matthew’s Gospel provides a clear illustration of this contrasting style in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, “You have heard it said of old, ‘you shall not kill.’ But I say to you, ‘Everyone angry with his brother is liable for judgment’.” (Matthew 5:21-22). He says many more things like that (“you have heard it said, but I tell you”). He is saying that, “You have heard it said of old” no longer suffices in the light of Jesus’ authority, even when the “old” is scripture itself. Jesus’ authority is vested in himself: “But I say to you,” he says. This is new and different for these folks who are with him in that synagogue. It is not new and different for us because we live in New Testament times and we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Those folks from our gospel text for today had no such belief. He was just a visitor to their congregation, but he really stirred things up! Now, did all of these folks become followers of Christ? On that point, the gospel remains silent. We do know that most folks who saw or heard Jesus eventually fit into one of three (or possibly more) categories. They either believed he was the Messiah and they followed him; they really didn’t know for sure and they just thought of him as a different “ultra-religious” kind of guy; or they were intimidated by his authority and power and they decided they needed to eliminate him.

E. I guess what we should ask today is, “What about us?” How do we see Jesus? Do any of the people around us see

Christ's authority working through us? Jesus moved the teachings of scripture (the scripture of his time) from past wisdom into present vocation: "You have heard it said of old ... but I say to you." Authority comes from walking the talk, from faith whose witness is not only what scripture confesses, but also what our lives embody!

F. In this story from Mark, Jesus fortified this new kind of authority by exorcizing an unclean spirit from a man. The text says, "And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him" (Mark 1:26). Jesus showed that he had the power to heal. Again, the text says, "They were amazed, and they kept asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching - with authority!'" (Mark 1:27a). This text today is all about "authority" - a new kind of authority. Many were getting the idea that this man - Jesus - was indeed different than any other person they had ever seen or heard about. The text says, "At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee" (Mark 1:28). These people felt compelled to tell others because what they had seen and heard was so amazing that they were astounded, and when we experience something astounding we normally want to tell others about it.

G. Well. That's exactly what Jesus wants us to do. In Matthew 28 Jesus gives us "The Great Commission." He said, "Go to all nations and make them disciples; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28: 19). Through this "Great Commission" we have

been given authority by Christ to go out into the world and make disciples “of all nations.” That’s a pretty big task. We have our work cut out for us. Now is the time for action. We will be singing of such action in the hymn following this message. We’ll sing: “Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered our human story; God in him is centered. He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded, with grace unbounded. Tell how the Father sent the Son to save us. Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us. Tell how the Spirit calls from every nation - God’s new creation.” Those are some powerful words - my friends! So now, let’s live out those words. With God’s help and the power of the Holy Spirit, let’s get out into the world and get to it! We can tell the world about the Author of creation - Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.