

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 1, 2015

Who's In charge?"

Mark 1:21-28

Maybe you've heard the story about the 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 as all. The first day of school he still had the cast on. He looked at his class roster and realized he'd been assigned 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 contempt, 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 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 problem with discipline problems that entire year.

In today's passage, the people were absolutely amazed at the authority of Jesus and his teachings. He has amazing authority, like no one had ever seen before.

Do you remember arguing as a kid? You'd get into an argument over something really simple and stupid. The argument would go back and forth, back and forth and finally somebody would holler out, "Oh yeah, who said?" It was the cue to validate your source. You might respond by saying, "So 'n so said so!" Or some other person in authority said so. We tried to get our point across with someone else's authority. Let's look at some of them.

There's Parental Authority: Up until a certain age, and that's different for different kids and family situations, Mom and Dad have 100% authority over us. I remember growing up, when my Dad whistled, you better come running and you better holler "Coming" as loud as you could. We were attuned to Dad's whistle. That was just one of the ways we knew that our parents ruled the roost.

Then There is Boot Camp Authority: The Drill Instructor or Company Commander weren't just in charge, they were God. You didn't do anything without their permission. You ate, slept, walked, talked, went to the bathroom when they told you to. They even told you how long of a shower to take, when to brush and how much toilet paper you could use. They were in charge. They might not have been God but they sure acted like they had God on the phone and had put him on hold to deal with you. That's the kind of authority they had.

Then There is the Authority of Age: Sometimes there are those who we cherish and whose wisdom and authority come simply from their age. They've lived longer than anyone we know. They've experienced more and seen more than anyone else and their opinion carries great weight. It might be a parent or grandparent. Or a trusted member of the church. They speak with the voice of experience and the authority of years.

Then There's the Authority of Knowledge: Sometimes we respect people because we know that they know more than we do. They are the experts we're just beginners. A perfect example is Mr. Miyagi in Karate Kid. Remember, Daniel was the new kid who was bullied by a bunch of thugs who knew karate. He discovers that the apartment handyman knows karate and asks him to teach him. Mr. Miyagi agrees but then has Daniel doing a series of what appears to be meaningless tasks like painting the fence and waxing cars. Wax on - wax off. In reality, Mr. Miyagi was training Daniel's muscles for the karate moves.

Then There's the Authority of a Position and a Person: A major, a judge, a school principal or superintendent, someone who commands respect. Someone who is a member of the police force in a high crime area of a big city. Someone who works with juvenile crime. Someone who teaches Sunday School classes. A respected person who has given of himself or herself to serve to improve community recreation or activities. To serve to improve community in general. Some people just have an air of authority about them.

That's the way Jesus was. Whenever he spoke, he spoke with authority. He wasn't arrogant or prideful. He just carried himself in such a way that it set him apart. I've always imagined Jesus as one of those people whom you might not see enter the room. He never made the grand entrance. But before long you felt his presence. You might not even be aware of it at first because it was something so subtle. But pretty soon you'd find yourself drawn to him. Wonder why? Because his words rang true. His words came from the heart and they were filled with power and authenticity. It was as if he had a direct line to God. And that's what amazed his listeners.

There were no gimmicky tricks or false promises to get folks to open up their wallets to support his ministry. There was no phony manipulation. Jesus was truly concerned about everyone who came to hear him. Jesus wanted them to understand, to know, to learn about God's love and forgiveness. He was so concerned that he risked himself and shared himself with everyone he met.

The other thing that was so amazing was that Jesus not only spoke with authority, but he lived what he spoke. The authority of his teaching extended to the authority of his actions. And the day of this particular incident, his words were punctuated with an exclamation point of authority and authenticity when he healed the man. He backed up his words with deeds.

And in a sense, that is Good News. As we look at Jesus' life and ministry we see that he had authority not only to speak, but he had authority over demons, who fell at his feet and trembled in his presence and fled as soon as he spoke.

Jesus had authority over illness, healing thousands of leprosy and every kind of infirmity you can think of. He has authority over sin, forgiving our sins while here, and then taking the punishment for our sins on the cross. And in so doing, he destroyed the power of sin over us, if we just turn to him.

Not only that, but Jesus had authority even over death. He raised Lazarus, the widow's son and Jairus' daughter from the dead. And death couldn't hold him either. As a consequence, it no longer holds us. Jesus holds the authority in our lives. Not sin and death.

Jesus did more than staple his tie to his chest, he gave himself up to be nailed to the cross for our sin and for our sake. No wonder everyone was amazed by Jesus. No wonder he had such an amazing authority. Does Jesus have that authority in your life? Have you invited him to be the core to your beliefs, the rock upon which to stand and build your life? If yes, then accept his invitation to come to his table and receive his grace. Amen.