

**ST PAUL'S RONDEBOSCH
SERMON: (FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)
31 FEBRUARY 2021
YEAR B**

**READINGS: DEUTERONOMY 18:15-20 //PSALM 111//
1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13// MARK 1:21-28**

.....
God of light and life, open our eyes as well as our ears that we may not only hear your Word today but might see your Word lived out fully in our lives in your world, through Christ our Lord who is the Light of the World. Amen

After calling His first four disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee Mark tells us that Jesus and His disciples went to the city of Capernaum – a port city on the Sea of Galilee and the hometown of Peter.

In our Gospel reading of today Mark 1:21-28 we read on the Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. *“The people were astounded (amazed) at his teaching for he taught as one having authority, not as the scribes (teachers of the law.)”(NRSV)*

Why would Mark make such a statement, surely the teachers of the law (Scribes) had the ultimate spiritual authority? They had been the spiritual leaders in that community for years, and were respected for their deep learning, and knowledge of the law. Isn't that what authority is all about?

This morning I would like us reflect on the difference between the authority of the Teachers of the Law (Scribes) and the authority of Jesus

But first let us look at the meaning of the word authority according to the dictionary authority is:

“the power or right to give orders, to make decisions, and enforce obedience.”

“ about a person or organization having political or administrative power and control.”

“ is the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behaviour”

The authority of the Scribes and the Teachers of the Law

The Scribes and teachers of the law, were part of the Sanhedrin the Jewish ruling body. They were scholars who interpret and teach the Torah and gave binding judgments regarding its application.

They were the religious elite, the self-righteous legalists and very conservative passing judgments based on authority from their knowledge of earlier experts on the law. They were powerful and enjoyed considerable respect. The best seats in the synagogue are reserved for them, and people rise to their feet when they enter a room. People call them “rabbi,” They speak and act in ways that make others feel inferior to them in terms of knowledge or experience or wisdom.

So their authority was based on status seeking, they expect people to respect, them because of the position they hold, this is called **positional authority**. They were concerned about their titles, credentials and prestige that give them authority over others.

Sometimes we are like that we are concerned about our own title, credentials and prestige that gives us authority over others and we demand or expect respect to be given to us because of our titles.

My dear friends Jesus’ authority is a different kind of authority:

Unlike the scribes, Jesus teaches with **personal authority**. His authority is based not on his credentials, titles nor his ability to cite the commandments and laws, but on the Spirit that descended on him at his baptism. In Mark 1 v 11 we read **“and a voice came from heaven ‘You are my Son whom I love, with you I am pleased”**

Jesus is the Son of God and his authority comes from God, and in obedience he humbled himself

Jesus authority was **not that of domination**, but the authority of one who empowers others and makes them grow.

The authority of Jesus was based on his welcoming of sinners and prostitutes. The welcoming of little children, the poor, the outcasts and the marginalized. The authority of Jesus was based on a life of service, not ruling. His life was hallmarked by betrayal and personal sacrifice, for standing up for what is right and experience rejection and that is why people respected his authority.

(Like some of our own political and religious leaders – Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela have experienced in the past—who stood up for the poor, the underprivileged, the oppressed, the vulnerable and the abused in our country)

This is called ***Relational Authority it has a deeply human and humble approach***

Jesus even has authority over Satan and the evil in the world

And so we are not surprised that even the evil spirits obeyed him

Verse 23: ***“Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit (evil spirit), and he cried out, ‘What have you to do with Jesus of Nazareth?’ Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”***(NRSV)

What is interesting here, is that even an evil spirit knew and recognizes who Jesus was but the religious teachers of the law did not.

The unclean spirit confesses a deep knowledge of Jesus. First, he says, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” and by saying that, he recognised the authority that was in the humanity of Christ. Secondly, he says, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” and by this he recognised the Divine nature of Christ, and that Jesus’ authority comes from God.

By driving out the unclean spirits and healing of the man Jesus proved his authority over Satan and the evil in the world.

I know talk of evil spirits and demons seems primitive and makes us uncomfortable and some people do not believe in the evil forces of the devil but there are people who are possessed by evil spirits today and exorcism still take place today.

But today we are also confronted with other kinds of evil spirits //demons that control and take over our lives.

Saint Augustine, an early fifth century Bishop in North Africa, said ***“that every single person has a God shaped vacuum in his soul. We attempt to fill this hole with a host of other things, but ultimately nothing satisfies our hunger for meaning and significance except Jesus and His saving Gospel.***

We try to fill this God shaped hole with money, power, authority, credentials, titles, pleasure, alcohol, food , gambling, ,sports and an endless list of attractions or distractions that leave us empty – And these become our personal demons (evil spirits). We try to find meaning in everything except Jesus Christ and His will for our lives.”

When the man with the evil spirit asks “***What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? (NRSV)***” He senses the distance between his life and Jesus’. His words betray his emptiness and isolation. He speaks not only for himself but for all those in the synagogue that day and for us today. He represents everyone who has ever experienced the brokenness of life. He represents the anxiety, the isolation, the fear of retrenchment, depression, death and illnesses because of the COVID 19 pandemic He is speaks for all who feel disconnected from themselves, others, and God,

And behind his question is, the unspoken longing and hope that Jesus would say, “***Everything. I have everything to do with you, I love you, I care for you, I want to help you***” Those are the words that can begin to put his life and our lives back together.

CONCLUSION

My dear friends if you are struggling with the demons (evil spirits) of

- Temptation – Jesus has the authority to set you free from darkness to light
- A broken heart—Jesus has the authority to heal it
- Despair and hopelessness – Jesus has the authority to put hope in your heart
- Restlessness and depression – Jesus has the authority to bring healing and stillness

Jesus has the authority to free and restore us to be ourselves again, He does this by saying “***Be quiet! Come out of him/her***”

What are the spiritual demons that you (or a loved one) are struggling with this morning that separate you from God? Admit it to Jesus he has the authority to free you. AMEN