

28.01.24 - Psalm 111, Mark 1: 21-28 Rev. L. Vawer One with Authority

Cast your minds back to your school days, which of your teachers had the most impact on you? Which one do you remember most clearly? And then try and think why. Was it their teaching style which worked for you? Were they very strict or were they a bit of a pussy cat? What was it about them that made such an impact that you can still remember them?

I asked myself the same questions and three teachers really stuck out in my mind. I remember my first day at school, Miss Durnell took my hand and led me into the classroom, talked to me and let me play in the Wendy House, as it was then. And then Mr Lewis in my Junior school who always had time to listen and to help. Both showed so much kindness, not just to me but to all the children. But then I also remembered the head teacher at the high school where I went for my A levels and told me in no uncertain terms that I couldn't join the English literature class because I hadn't read enough Shakespeare and the PE teacher who told me she would knock my block off if I ever ducked again when the rounders ball was heading toward me. I always made sure that I opted for badminton after that – a much gentler option and I never ducked.

What made me remember them I wondered. All spoke with authority; all were good teachers and yet there were two who I remember fondly and two I still shudder when I recall them. Interestingly, I did join the English class and achieved my best result, perhaps her comment worked in my favour, it made me very determined to succeed.

In Mark's gospel we are frequently told that Jesus was taught people and that they were amazed by his teaching "*because he taught them as one who had authority,*" yet Mark tells us little about what Jesus actually said. There may be a clue in this passage.

The people are amazed by his teaching. Then he sets a man free from the grip of evil. After which the people are even more amazed at his teaching.

We are seeing teaching put into action, given a visible form. What Jesus does is a direct outworking of who he is and what he has been saying, and when people see it in practice, they recognise it as more than just words but as teaching "*with authority*".

With Integrity

First people are astounded because he teaches them as "*one who having authority*". It suggests that Jesus' style of teaching seemed more authoritative than what people were used to. The most common style of the Rabbis in Jesus' day would be to refer back to earlier authorities. It would be similar to us backing up our thoughts and arguments by saying "as the Bishop has said" or "as Sam Wells wrote in his book....". Rabbis would teach by presenting the teachings of authoritative teachers from the past.

The impression we have from the gospels is that Jesus rarely did that. Instead, he taught as though the truth of what he said was self-evident. This is a new teaching—and one with authority, rather than one who needs to appeal to anyone or anything else.

Jesus knew he was – he was confident in his identity. It was confirmed by God at his baptism "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" And tested by Satan in the wilderness. "*If you are the Son of God,.....*". There are no ifs with Jesus, his character and teaching come together with integrity. He is totally and utterly integrated. A bit like the integrated appliances you may have at home – there are no gaps, and everything fits together.

So with us, are we ready to give an account of the hope that is within us not appealing to the past but rather living the Christian life in the here and now, with all its joys and sorrows, confident

in the people we are called to be as part of the body of Christ? Are we ready to speak with integrity and authority as we have been taught through the example of Jesus?

With Impact

Second, after Jesus healed the man with an unclean spirit the issue of authority raises its head again. This time it is the teaching itself that is described as having authority. When Jesus speaks things happen. There is authority in what he says.

Jesus speaks to the people, and his words have an immediate impact in front of their eyes – the man is healed. His message is a message of freedom from oppression, and his words have that authority for that to happen. He walks his talk.

Is this true for us? do our words follow through in our actions: do our actions proclaim our faith?

Jesus Authority

The whole focus of Jesus authority is related to what he says and does, not to some badge of office that he wears. There is no suggestion that Jesus has authority because he is a properly ordained Rabbi. People do not listen to him because he has been vested with authority. They declare him to have authority because they have listened to him and found what he says and says to be authoritative. His authority is earned. And earned by the fact that his message is a message of freedom and hope that is backed up by people being set free at his word and touch. It is the same with us and the ministry we have each been given.

We need to know who we are, our identity – Gods beloved children, part of the body of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are Gods chosen people from the foundation of the world, dearly loved, confirmed in our Baptism, and strengthened by word and sacrament as we worship together week by week.

We are Gods chosen people who are integrated so that who we are and what we say and do in our everyday lives hold together and have validity. And that is our witness.

Do our words and actions bring, freedom, healing, and wholeness to those around us? Do they bring the kingdom of God, as we faithfully follow Jesus the teacher, the one with authority?

Be amazed, be very amazed .

I wonder sometimes if I forget to look around me and be amazed at what God is doing, if I forget to praise him and be thankful for the times he hears and acts with authority even now.

I was reminded by one of our congregation recently that God always hears and answers but its not always the answer we want. Perhaps that is where the problem lies. We want God to act on our terms and when he doesn't then.....

It made me think of our pastoral meeting a week or so ago. There is such a fantastic ministry of prayer here , there is such faithfulness and obedience to persistence in prayer, there is integrity in our prayers and yet looking at the prayer list it made me think where were the answered prayers.

So let me share with you answered prayer.

Barbara who we have prayed through her crisis and is now being loved and cared for at home, her only weakness being old age! Praise God hearing our prayers and for her 90+ years.

Baby Edith who was so prematurely born, who we have prayed for since her birth and was able to be at home for Christmas and is thriving now at home, ready to be weaned from her dependence on oxygen. Praise God for hearing our prayers.

Oliver who has been prayed for since his birth and is now living into young adulthood. Praise God for hearing our prayers.

And Steve Jack, who we have prayed for through his crisis of health and has recently received clear scans and is back in the band. He is so thankful of our prayers so praise God for hearing our prayers and for the witness that has been to him.

And sometimes our prayers are answered with the greatest healing of all, not what we want but what is needed.

All those prayers and I just hadn't been prepared to be amazed by God's faithfulness and authority.

Maybe this is an opportunity for us all to reflect and be amazed, and for us to say with authority

Praise the Lord, for to him belongs eternal praise.