

Jesus Rules!

Epiphany 4 (Yr B)

[Psalm 111; Deuteronomy ; 1 Corinthians 8:1-1; Mark 1:21-28]

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POINTS TO PONDER

1. The sermon names three things Jesus does with authority. Can you name any other things Jesus does with authority?
 2. Why is it important that we recognize Jesus' authority?
 3. What do you do when doubt begins to intrude on your faith?
 4. How can we be outfitted for Spiritual warfare? (Hint: cf. Ephesians 6:10-18)
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Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and our Lord and King, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Let us pray: God our creator, who in the beginning commanded the light to shine out of darkness: we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, shine into the hearts of all your people, Amen.

Last week, we heard Jesus say, **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**¹

What is the kingdom of God? It is God's presence coming to all peoples and nations, breaking into the very brokenness of the world, fulfilling God's promise to restore all things. It means things will finally be done on earth as they are in heaven. God will rule and His people will be glad.

So, we pick up the story now to see what life in God's kingdom looks like.

Our Gospel reading includes at least two things almost no one believes in anymore: authoritative teaching and spiritual warfare.

And there are two primary way of ignoring them. One is to deny their existence outright. That is what the so-called Enlightenment thinkers told us to do. They said modern people must question all authority. They said all tradition, all revelation, all external authority must be put under the microscope of personal reason and submitted to the moral authority of the Self. And we are now watching modernity's over-reach turn into the madness of post-modernity which says that “here's a truth, there's a truth, nowhere whatsoever is there any real truth.”

¹ Mark 1:15

Part of that subjection to reason was the enlightenment thinkers' rejection of the supernatural – not only the supernatural miracles of God but even the person of God. Purposeful query turned to bald Skepticism which has sadly replaced a meaningful faith.

So, today's reading, in today's world, is just about as crazy, as preposterous, as you can get. Here we have the God-Man, Jesus, teaching not with suggestions for "your best life now" but with the authority of the living God. And we have a demon-possessed man healed, the unclean spirit cast out, and everyone left bug-eyed, awestruck.

Now, the other way is no less a denial but a much more subtle one. And it is the one we swim in, primarily, in our country today. Our culture, ostensibly, likes Jesus. But the popular Jesus is a far cry from the biblical Jesus. The popular Jesus fits squarely into the mold of Self-centered thinking. Instead of accepting the Jesus of the Bible with all His claims of lordship and exclusivity, many have accepted a half-Jesus, which is really no Jesus. It is a Jesus perfectly contoured to personal desires and felt needs. He has all the encouragement and good vibes we want without the salvation and sanctification that we desperately need.

We can call this sort-of half-Jesus "Jesus Lite" – half the calories and none of the taste. This 'Jesus Lite' is a sterilized version of the real Jesus. Jesus Lite does not surprise us, astonish us, or amaze us. Jesus Lite is waifish and demur; and so, he does not cause us to say, "**What is this? A new teaching with authority!**"² Jesus Lite is safe, comfortable, manageable. Jesus Lite never disagrees with nor does he challenge us. For some, this is attractive but if you have a god who never disagrees with you or challenges you, you maybe be worshipping a shadowy figure in the mirror!

The problem with these views is that they do not accept the complete authority of Jesus Christ. They are, in fact, a rejection of the King of the kingdom that has drawn near. You cannot be saved in a world without Jesus, but you cannot be saved in a world with Jesus Lite, either.

So, we need the real Jesus who can do something about our sin. We need the real Jesus who takes matters into His own hands. We need the real Jesus who teaches, heals, reshapes, recreates, raises the dead. We need the authoritative Jesus of the Kingdom of God. And that is the Jesus we have as we rightly attend to His Word, as we joyfully receive His grace in His Holy Supper and as we remember the washing of regeneration³ He gave to us in our baptisms.

With this in mind, let us take a look at this real, authoritative Jesus of the Kingdom of God by considering three things. 1.) Jesus teaches with authority, 2.) Jesus heals with authority, and 3.) Jesus saves with authority.

² cf. Mark 1:27

³ cf. Titus 3:5

From our Gospel lesson: **“And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”**⁴

Jesus never used the prophetic formula “thus says the Lord.” In contrast to the scribes, whose authority derived from the teachings they received from their forefathers, Jesus spoke as one uniquely authorized by His Father in heaven. Jesus teaches with authority.

Next, Jesus heals with authority. From our reading: **“And immediately 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 out with a loud voice, came out of him.”**⁵

Just as Jesus faced Satan immediately after His Baptism, so also here He is met by a demon-possessed man at the beginning of His teaching ministry. Although the disciples would be slow to realize just who Jesus is, the unclean spirit recognized the authority of Jesus. He knew who Jesus was and what Jesus was doing. And so, he does something interesting. He mentions Jesus’ name twice. “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.*”

‘Jesus then rebukes the demon and orders him to come out of the man. In so doing He asserts absolute authority over the evil spirit – and, implicitly, over the evil spirit’s own demonic master, Satan. Here, in a very practical way, we see the results of the fulfillment of the coming kingdom; Christ the King invades Satan’s territory and asserts His kingship over it. The authoritative king has arrived.’⁶ Jesus heals with authority.

Jesus teaches with authority; He heals with authority; and finally, Jesus saves with authority. Again, from our text: **“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’ And at once His fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.”**⁷

No one in that synagogue sat unimpressed. ‘What is this?’ they asked. Even the unclean spirits obey. The word ‘even’ there tells us it was more than just the teaching that caught their attention. It was what the teaching accomplished that was so remarkable. To teach as Jesus did was impressive. But what was more impressive was that even the demons could not resist him. Jesus’ teaching had an effect. Think about this: *Jesus saved a man from a demon inside him.* Who else can do that?

⁴ Mark 1:21-22

⁵ Mark 1:23-26

⁶ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Mk 1:21–28.

⁷ Mark 1:27-28

What do you, beloved, make of this kind of authority? Jesus' teaching was – and is – astonishing, but Jesus proved Himself to be more than just a great moral teacher. So many today want to limit him to be only that. Jesus can fit inside the Enlightenment view if He is stripped of authority. He can become Jesus Lite if we treat His class as merely one of which we casually audit. But with Jesus that is simply not possible. In the synagogue that day, Jesus claimed to be more than a teacher. He claimed to be the authoritative King of God's kingdom. C.S. Lewis helps us see this in his great book *Mere Christianity*. Talking about Jesus' radical claim to forgive sins, Lewis says:

"I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, and what does He do with it? He uses it for our good. He goes to the cross. He died on our behalf. He saves our soul! And with that same authority, He rises again, bringing many sons to glory! really

That is genuinely good news, because if you are like me, you just cannot seem to get your act together. If my salvation was dependent on me keeping up, I would never make it. But it is not dependent on me. It is dependent on Jesus. Jesus has authority over me. And He has authority over you, too. When you cannot seem to get any better, Jesus has authority to save you from yourself. When you fall into the trap of the enemy's temptation, Jesus has authority to set you free from darkness. When your heart is broken, he has the authority to bind it up again. When you feel hopeless and in despair, he has authority to put hope deep in your heart. He has authority to make your restless soul still. And when you fall into the sleep of death someday in the future, He has authority to raise you up again. Jesus has the authority to fix everything in the deepest part of your being and no one can stop Him.

As the world spirals out of control, the One who is in control, the one who has ultimate authority – Jesus says, **"Take heart; I have overcome the world."**⁸ Amen.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.⁹

⁸ John 16:33

⁹ Romans 15:13