

1:

**January 31, 2021 ~ 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany ~ God's Authority**

**O Lord, through the written word and through the spoken word may we know your living word, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

One of my favourite movies continues to be The Wizard of Oz. As a child, I only saw it in black and white and I remember being thrilled when I first saw the land of Oz in colour.

One part of the movie always makes me teary. It is when the scarecrow is given a special gift from the Wizard. Although he is actually smart, the scarecrow wishes for a brain and here is what he receives.

**Wizard of Oz:**

They have one thing you haven't got: a diploma. Therefore, by virtue of the **authority** vested in me by the Universitartus Committiarum E Pluribus Unum, I hereby confer upon you the honorary degree of ThD.

**Scarecrow:**

ThD?

**Wizard of Oz:**

That's... Doctor of Thinkology.

*By the authority vested in me. **Authority.*** The word means the power or the right to give orders and make decisions. Police officers have the authority of laws to give us a speeding ticket. Governments have the authority to make us pay our taxes. Jouni and I have a brand-new grandson, who was born in Finland. The Finnish government has the authority to accept his names that will be put on his birth certificate. This little boy will be both a Finnish citizen and a Canadian citizen. There is a law in Iceland that children must have Icelandic names. This preserves the language and the culture.

An Anglican deacon who served years ago at St. Paul's moved to Iceland and when he became an Icelandic citizen, the authority of Icelandic law made him change his name. Today that rule no longer applies.

All of us know that authority is important for a stable society and our prayer is always that human authority is always based upon the ultimate authority of all ~ GOD.

## 2:

God made the world and God made all the laws of physics and mathematics that govern our universe. God made each of us also in the image of God and we must bring God's authority into all of our decisions.

Here is what the New Testament says about God's authority as the foundation for human authority:

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.* Romans 13:1

When Jesus sent out his disciples two by two to do ministry, he told them that:

*I have given you authority.* Luke 10:19

The divinity of Jesus is made apparent early on in his ministry. Our gospel passage for today, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, is from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Mark's Gospel.

Here is the passage:

Mark 1:21-28

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 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.' 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' 26 And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Jesus is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. This seaside community is by the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Here is a photo of my Dad and me outside the entrance of this ancient city.

### 3:

This is the beginning of his ministry. We are still in chapter one of Mark's gospel. As the people listen to Jesus, they are immediately aware that he is speaking with **AUTHORITY, GOD'S AUTHORITY**. And then Jesus does a healing with a man who has some kind of mental illness, what the people call **a man with an unclean spirit**. And the people are even more amazed and they say for the second time **What is this, a new teaching with authority!**

At the Ascension of Jesus, he tells his disciples:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:18*

The psalmist writes that *God has shown his people the power of his works.*  
Psalm 111 verse 6

God has authority and when we turn in faith to the Lord, I believe that we carry within us the ultimate authority and this is the authority of LOVE.

The Book of Deuteronomy talks a lot about LAWS and AUTHORITY. In our passage for this morning from Dt 18:15-20, we learn about prophets and how God calls prophets whom he will command to speak with his voice and in the name of the Lord. In other words, with AUTHORITY.

We have to be careful. When we think about authority, we can't think about a heavy hand, about laws that control us and limit our behaviour. When we carry God's authority out into the world, we are bringing unconditional love out into the world. We have to keep our egos out of the way.

Jesus healed the man in the synagogue on the sabbath. He broke the laws of tradition by healing on the sabbath, by doing work. God's laws are above human laws. That is what we must remember and do.

In our teaching as Christians, we must show care and kindness always. If a man comes to church for the very first time with his hoodie up, don't embarrass him by telling him that he must remove it. Welcome him into the body of Christ. He will figure this out on his own soon enough. If someone brings a cup of coffee into worship, let them. That is not the time or the place to reprimand them. I want them to be comfortable and to open their hearts to the love and grace available to them.

4:

That is why I don't believe in special parking spots for clergy and the music director at St. Paul's. What if I had my own parking spot and the human authority started to go to my head and I started to think that I deserved it? What if someone else parked in my spot? What would I do? Would I enforce the law and use my authority and ask them to move? Would I put a note on their windshield?

God's authority is not about elevating ourselves but about humbling ourselves. It is about taking up the cross of Christ. God's authority doesn't lead to fame or to earthly power but to the self-emptying cross of our salvation.

God's authority means that we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ and be compassionate. God's authority leads to our salvation.

Amen.