4th Sunday after the Epiphany

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20/Mark 1: 21-28

Immanuel, Lincoln

28 January 2018

**AUTHORITY**

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the name of the Father, + the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

**They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath (Jesus) entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority. . .**

My dear friends in Christ:

When Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts, he was campaigning hard for a second term in office.

* One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (and no lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue.
* It was late afternoon and Herter was famished.
* As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken.
* She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.
* “Excuse me,” Governor Herter said, “do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?”
* “Sorry,” the woman told him. “I’m supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person.”
* “But I’m starved,” the governor said.
* “Sorry,” the woman said again. “Only one to a customer.”
* Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around.
* “Do you know who I am?” he said. “I am the governor of this state.”
* “Do you know who I am?” the woman said. “I’m the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister.”

**Authority** is defined *as the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.*

* To Governor Herter’s chagrin—at this particular venue—he was not the one who had authority over the fried chicken.

On Tuesday evening, President Trump will deliver his first official State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress.

* There is much fanfare and much anticipation as to what our President will say.
* His speech will be televised around the world into various languages.
* No doubt the majority of those in the chamber will receive his speech with thunderous applause of approval.
* With much authority the president will speak, covering such topics as the economy, immigration, and the war on terrorism.
* He will no doubt speak with great hope, confidence and authority about the future of our country and his “America First” policy.

The State of the Union address is a good thing, but, most of the time, in this sort of speech, you really don’t learn anything new.

* Will the economy continue to grow?
  + All indicators say yes, but no one really knows.
* Will we ever see immigration reform and our borders secured?
  + God only knows.

Although the State of the Union address is treated with much pomp and circumstance and the President speaks with great authority.

* But most of the time, it is more of a pep talk than anything else.

Let’s go back in time to a different “state of the union” address.

* At this address the audience is much smaller.
* There is no television and no fanfare.
* I’m talking about the “speech” that Jesus gave recorded in our Gospel lesson.
* Jesus wasn’t talking about the state of the union,
  + but the state of the world.
* He wasn’t talking about a war against terrorism.
  + He was talking about a future war with Satan.
* And it was much more than a pep talk.
* As people listened to Jesus speak, they were very struck by the way he spoke.
* For Jesus carried himself with such authority.

And then Jesus proved his authority by casting an evil spirit out of a man who had been in attendance.

* The people there were **amazed** – they had never seen someone conduct himself with so much authority!

But really, they shouldn’t have been surprised –

* Moses had predicted that someone would come with an incredible amount of authority, and now, he was here –
* Jesus Christ, standing in the synagogue before them.

Today, we are going to focus on the authority of Jesus Christ and his Word, and we’re going to let Moses teach us, even though Moses lived over a thousand years before Jesus was born.

In our Old Testament lesson we find Moses delivering a “state of the union” - address of his own to the people of Israel.

* They had just escaped captivity in Egypt, and God had just given to Moses the Ten Commandments.
* Moses was addressing the people about these commandments from God.
* Right in the middle of this speech, Moses took a break from the commandments, and spoke to them about the coming Messiah.
* Moses begins by declaring: **“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”**
* He’s speaking about Jesus here.

Two things to note about Moses’ description of Christ –

* FIRST Moses said that Jesus would be a prophet **“like me.”**
* How would Jesus be like Moses?
* Remember, of all the prophets, Moses was the only one God spoke to face to face.
* In the same way, Jesus would have face to face contact with God the Father.
* Just like Moses, Jesus could say that he has stood in the presence of God the Father, and has received first-hand words of God to share with the people.
* That’s the first way Jesus would be like Moses.

SECONDLY, Moses said Jesus would be a prophet **“from among your own brothers.”**

* Jesus wouldn’t just descend from heaven like an angel, an outsider.
* He would become a human being, wrapped in human flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary and would be born a Jew.
* In this way, as Moses prophesied Jesus would be raised up **“from among your own brothers.”**

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus fulfills this prophecy of Moses exactly?

* In verses 17 and 18 we hear about this again: **“The Lord said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.’”**
* This is why Jesus spoke with so much authority – his words were literally God’s words.

The problem was many of the people of Israel did not recognize Jesus’ authority.

* They listened to what he said, but they didn’t like what they heard.
* Besides Jesus didn’t look like he had much authority
  + – he was brought up in the insignificant town of Nazareth.
  + – none of the leaders of Israel supported him.
* Sure he performed miracles, but he seemed too humble to be someone with so much authority.
* And so the people of Israel rejected Christ, rejected his words, and eventually crucified him, even mocking the words of God that Jesus had spoken to them.
* Why? They just did not see his authority.

Our world today has the exact same problem – our world today fails to see the authority of Jesus Christ and his Word.

* This past Tuesday I even heard one of our Nebraska State Senators refer to the Bi-ble as if it was just a book.
  + To him and many other the Bible has no authority.
* Many today look at preachers – they’re not speaking the Word of God – there’s no authority there.
* Our world today even goes so far as
  + to replace the Bible,
    - with their own teachings…
  + to replace God’s representatives,
    - with their own teachers.

Moses spoke about this in our OT lesson: **“But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”**

* False doctrine was such a serious offense in the Old Testament that it called for capital punishment.
* Today, our world commits this same offense, not recognizing the authority of Jesus Christ and his Word, replacing it with man-made ideas.

I came across a story of a man who was driving recklessly in his truck.

* He was rough and tough, proving his manhood to the world by speeding down a narrow stretch of road passing cars left and right.
* To his shock, an SUV that he had passed way back was suddenly right on his tail,
* and that SUV had red and blue police lights flashing.
* As it turned out, it was the sheriff, driving a sheriff’s unmarked vehicle that blended in with all the rest of the cars.
* The reckless driver was pulled over and fined, arrested for drunk driving, and taken to the county jail.
* He did not recognize the authority of that sheriff while he was driving recklessly because the authority of the sheriff was hidden.

And so it is with Jesus.

* His authority as the Son of God is hidden, wrapped in the flesh and blood of a humble carpenter who was born of a virgin from Nazareth named Mary.
* His authority is hidden within the humble pages of a book called the Bible.
* His authority is hidden in the humble preaching and teaching of His called and ordained servants.

Millions of people push away the Bible, talk about Christ in a disrespectful way.

* Why? They fail to recognize his authority – it’s hidden.
* This is a temptation for us as well.
* When the rest of the world says, “It’s just a book,”
  + we might say to ourselves, “Maybe it is just a book.”
* When the rest of the world makes fun of God’s representatives, who speak the authoritative Word of God,
  + we are tempted to do the same.
* We are tempted to stop listening to God’s Word.
* It has no authority over my life, we say.
* Or I have more important things to do.

God has strong words for those who do not listen to his Words.

* Verse 19: **“If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.”**
* God is talking about punishment here.
* Eternal punishment in hell.
* That’s how God calls people to account.

But there is good news about Jesus Christ and his authority.

* You see, Jesus not only has the authority to condemn us for our sin.
* He also has the authority to forgive us.
* And he does.
* Jesus Christ forgives you for every sin you have ever committed in your life.
* He forgives you even for those times you have pushed away his Word.
* He forgives you for those times you have not recognized his Word as the authoritative Word of God.
* Jesus Christ has the authority to forgive you—and He does.

Where does Jesus get the authority to do this sort of thing?

* It’s because he is the Son of God.
* But not just that – there’s more.
* As the Son of God, Christ sacrificed himself on the cross for the sins of the world.
* He allowed himself to be killed, to take away your sins.
* And then he rose from the dead declaring His authority over sin, death and the devil.
* That’s what gives Christ the authority to forgive you of your sins.

My friends, of all the religions in the world, there is no other religion in which God himself becomes a man, and as a God-man humbles himself to the point of being publicly executed.

* Christianity is the only religion in which God – the Son of God – dies for the world.
* Christianity is the only religion in which God forgives the world.
* It’s the only religion in which God freely and completely forgives you and offers you eternal life as a gift, free of charge.

No other religion carries with it that much authority.

* It’s the only religion that’s true.
* It’s the only religion based on the historical fact that Christ, the Son of God, died, and then rose from the dead, and at that moment on Easter God forgave the world.
* This is the message of the Bible.
* A message filled with comfort and hope and joy.
* A message that Jesus shares with you this morning.
* A message with more authority than any speech or teaching or philosophy you have ever heard before.

This Tuesday evening during the State of the Union address, you will hear some interesting things, things like, “We hope the economy continue to grow.”

* “We want to defend our country, so we need to build a wall.”
* These are things that the President needs to say, and we pray for him, and for our country, that God’s will be done.

But when Jesus speaks to you, through his Word, there is much more authority.

* Jesus doesn’t say to you, “I hope you go to heaven someday.”
  + He says, “Because of me, you will go to heaven someday.”
* Jesus doesn’t say to you, “I might forgive you of your sins.”
  + He says to you, “Because of me, your sins are forgiven.”
* Do you see the authority?
* The Gospel is a sure thing – the words of God himself, the only sure thing you have in this unstable world.

That is why we gladly say “Yes”

* when Moses says to us, **“You must listen to him.”**
* Yes, we listen to Christ. He has saved us.
* He says it right here, in his Word.
* Today, we honor that Word as the very Word of God, the ultimate authority in our lives – what gives us strength and comfort and direction and hope.
* And for that, we rejoice.

Amen.