

**THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD**  
**Sermon for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, 2019**  
**Luke 4:31-44**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Luke 4:31-44: <sup>31</sup> **Then He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee and was teaching people on the Sabbath.** <sup>32</sup> **The people were amazed at His teaching, because His Word had authority.**

<sup>33</sup> **In the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. He cried out with a loud voice,** <sup>34</sup> **“Ha! What do we have in common with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God.”**

<sup>35</sup> **Jesus rebuked him: “Be quiet and come out of him!”**

**The demon threw him down in the middle of the crowd and came out of him, without doing him any harm.**

<sup>36</sup> **They were all amazed and began to ask one another, “What kind of speaking is this, that with authority and power He gives orders to unclean spirits, and they come out?”**

<sup>37</sup> **The news about Him kept spreading to every place in the surrounding region.**

<sup>38</sup> **Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon’s home. Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her.** <sup>39</sup> **He bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.**

<sup>40</sup> **When the sun was going down, all who had people who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him. He laid His hands on each one of them and healed them.**

<sup>41</sup> **Moreover, demons were also being cast out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!”**

**However, He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that He was the Christ.**

<sup>42</sup> **At daybreak Jesus came out and went to a solitary place. The crowds continued to look for Him. When they came to Him, they tried to keep Him from leaving them.** <sup>43</sup> **However, He told them, “I must tell the Good News of the kingdom of God in other cities also, because I have been sent for this purpose.”**

<sup>44</sup> **Then He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends on Christ,

In last Sunday’s Gospel, we saw Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, where He stood up and read from the prophet Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed, and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord,”* (Luke 4:18-19). As Jesus sat down to teach, He began with these startling words: *“Today, while you are listening, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled,”* (v. 21). Jesus’ messiahship was revealed to those in His hometown.

These words ought to have brought much joy to the people, but instead, they responded by trying to throw Jesus down a cliff. Therefore, Jesus went away. Today’s reading tells us where Jesus went when He left Nazareth. **He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee and was teaching people on the Sabbath.** <sup>32</sup> **The people were amazed at His teaching, because His Word had authority.**

What does it mean that Jesus’ **Word had authority**?

A similar account in Matthew helps us understand. There, Matthew says that *“When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as One who had authority, and not as their scribes.”* (Matthew 7:28-29). Apparently, the scribes would base too much on their own authority, and the authority of others. One important rabbi would say this, another rabbi would say that, and still another rabbi would say something else entirely different. By the time they finished quoting all the conflicting views from all the important rabbis, the listener had no better understanding of the truth of the text than when the scribe started teaching! On the other hand, Jesus pointed to the text of Holy Scripture, unpacked its meaning clearly, and the hearer knew what it meant when He was finished. There was no doubt in the hearer’s mind, who could not contradict anything Jesus said. The meaning might bring the terror of the Law, or it might bring the comfort of the Gospel. In either case, the meaning came through with clear confidence from the mouth of preacher, Jesus.

A perfect example of the authority of the Word is what happened at the synagogue. <sup>33</sup> **In the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. He cried out with a loud voice, <sup>34</sup> “Ha! What do we have in common with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God.”**

<sup>35</sup> **Jesus rebuked him: “Be quiet and come out of him!”**

**The demon threw him down in the middle of the crowd and came out of him, without doing him any harm.**

Jesus shows His present power and authority in healing this man *instantly* by commanding the demon to come out. The demon could not resist the Word of Jesus, it had to comply. The people **were all amazed and began to ask one another, “What kind of speaking is this, that with authority and power He gives orders to unclean spirits, and they come out?”**

The Holy Spirit then inspired Luke to include a couple other examples of that authority at work. <sup>38</sup> **Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon’s home. Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> He bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.**

<sup>40</sup> **When the sun was going down, all who had people who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him. He laid His hands on each one of them and healed them.** This is the authority of the Creator... the One through whom all things were made.<sup>1</sup>

Authority can be a hot topic today. It used to be that authority in the world was respected. People had respect for the authority of parents, police officers, elected officials, teachers, and so forth. Most people would at least pay lip service to the Apostle Paul’s encouragement to the Philippians when he said, *“Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing, and anything that is excellent and praiseworthy!”* (4:8). When people would debate the issues of the day, they searched for truth in order to determine what was right.

Not so today. Our culture has changed. Today, for example, through schooling systems, students are encouraged to question authority. Everything their parents teach them is wrong. They are taught that their own parents have no authority over them so cannot discipline them by giving them a smack and so forth if they misbehave. Many protesters of authority come from our university systems where they are taught that authority is corrupt and not to be trusted, that they have the right to treat all authority figures with absolute scorn. Many are taught to believe that anyone in authority is out to oppress you. This attitude has done serious damage to our culture.

This attitude of rebellion against authority is not a new thing. It is as King Solomon once lamented that there is nothing new under the sun.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is almost as old as creation itself when the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> *The LORD God commanded the man: “Although you may freely eat from every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! For in the day when you eat from it you will surely die,”* (Gen. 2:16-17). Here was the authority of the very Word of the God who created us. The commandment is clear and easy to understand, in fact, so clear and easy to understand that even young children understand. **YOU SHALL NOT EAT FROM THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL.** This is the command and it has the authority of the Word of God.

Yet it did not take very long before another voice asked a question, *“Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden!’?”* (Genesis 3:1). This voice had no authority. In fact, the Creator had given mankind authority over this creature. Adam and Eve should be the word of authority to the serpent. Nevertheless, the serpent enticed Adam and Eve into rebellion against the authority of the Word of God. Mankind listened to the word of a serpent instead of the Word of God. The entire history of the pain and suffering of the human race can be traced back to this one central flaw. We humans constantly rebel against the authority of the Word of God. The book of Judges ends with a sad condemnation, *Everyone did what he thought was right, (21:25).*

Even God’s people rebel against the authority of the Word of God. Today we see many churches rebel against the Word of God. So often God has made clear judgment upon certain matters, yet because what God says doesn’t sit well with them, churches will twist and change the Word, teaching instead what people’s itching ears want to hear.<sup>3</sup> People

<sup>1</sup> John 1:3

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9

<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3

will not put up with sound doctrine because it is not compatible with their own thinking. Instead of listening to the truth of the authority of the Word, they turn to what the Apostle Paul refers to as “*godless myths*” in 1 Timothy 4:7. This is to be expected. After all, we find the man that had the unclean demon not somewhere *away* from the synagogue but *inside* it, so why wouldn’t we expect to find the devil and his demons today attacking the church from inside its walls? We must be on our guard.

But before we go out and condemn everyone else, we need to ask ourselves, *Are we any different?* How often do we get into all kinds of problems simply because we do not take the time to see what the Word has to say on the topic? How often do we make decisions based on what is right in our own eyes instead of what is right in God’s eyes? How often have we given more authority to our experiences, our opinions, or our feelings than to the Word of God? How often have we placed our relationship with other people above our relationship with God? How often have we verbally abused someone simply because they want to hear what the Word of God has to say on a topic? How often have we placed our authority above the authority of the Word of God? Quite often, our desire is to place our human reason *above* the Word of God.

Whether we like it or not, God’s Word is the ultimate, final authority. The Bible, the Word of God, is not like any other book. Luke tells us today that Jesus spoke with authority. <sup>35</sup> **Jesus rebuked (the demon): “Be quiet and come out of him!” The demon threw (the man) down in the middle of the crowd and came out of him, without doing him any harm.... Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> He bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. <sup>40</sup> When the sun was going down, all who had people who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him. He laid His hands on each one of them and healed them.**

People with every kind of problem became whole again. God’s Word has not lost any of its power even today. The Holy Spirit has promised to work through it. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul had taught that the Good News “*is the power of God to save everyone who believes it,*” (Romans 1:16). He also taught that “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ,*” (Romans 10:17). The Word of God is the very power by which He works salvation in us. It is the ultimate authority.

The devil wants us to see God’s Word as oppressive, demeaning, and so forth. He wants us to believe that the authority of Christ’s Word *restricts* our freedom. He wants us to believe that the authority of Christ’s Word takes all the joy out of life. The devil will do anything and everything to take God’s Word away from us. If he can’t do that, then he will try to get us to ignore God’s Word, to see it as being something burdensome, to let it gather dust on the shelf rather than be the truth that saves us from sin.

Rather than being burdensome, the authority of Christ’s Word truly is a source of joy and security. Listen to a few of His teachings and promises: “*The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many,*” (Matt. 20:28). “*In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents,*” (Luke 15:10). “*The Son of Man has come to search for, and to save, what has been lost,*” (Luke 19:10). “*If you remain in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,*” (John 8:31-32). “*It is finished,*” (John 19:30). “*This is My body, which is given for you.... This cup is the new Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you,*” (Luke 22:19-20). “*Certainly, I am with you always, until the end of the age,*” (Matt. 28:20). All of these teachings and promises depend on the authority of Christ’s Word, the same Word that healed so many on that Sabbath in Capernaum so many years ago, the same Word that had said, “*Let there be light,*” and there was light.<sup>4</sup>

The authority of the Word of Christ is not just a promise. It is a promise backed up by deeds. Jesus often taught and promised something very outrageous: “*The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day,*” (Luke 9:22). He not only promised to die and then rise from the dead, but He kept that promise. Back in those days it would be easy to get the Romans to kill you on a cross, but only Christ could keep the promise to return to life after dying on a cross.

When Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, He kept His greatest promise. He earned forgiveness for all our sins. In earning forgiveness for us, He earned our adoption into the family of God as His brothers and sisters. He

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:3

earned our eternal salvation - life forever in His gracious, joyful presence. The authority of His Word is forever, for He Himself once said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will certainly not pass away,”* (Luke 21:33).

Most people have the wrong idea about Jesus. Many think He is a cosmic killjoy. They think that God is standing far off, with His arms crossed, making His demands of righteousness and perfection, waiting for us to come to Him, to earn our way home. It's almost like people have this view that God enjoys the separation and gleefully loves to keep sinners at arm's length, keeping them guessing about how He really feels about them.

We know that the authority of Christ's Word promises the exact opposite. He is the One who urges us to pray, *“Thy Kingdom come,”* and then answers that prayer and *brings the Kingdom of God to us*.

The is the message that the world desperately needs to hear, perhaps even more so now than ever before. Jesus told the people that He **“must tell the Good News of the kingdom of God in other cities also, because I have been sent for this purpose.”** We too, have been given the privilege to tell others of this Good News, the Word that forgives, the Word that blesses, the Word that creates and sustains faith, and, through that faith, delivers forgiveness, life, and salvation.

What a blessing we can be to others when we remain on the alert and watch for the opportunity to confess that authoritative Word of Christ to others, especially in our own backyard! Afterall, that Word tells us that *“There is also salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among human beings by which we must be saved,”* (Acts 4:12). What wonderful, authoritative news we have to tell others! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Almighty God, Your ears are always open to the prayers of Your people, and You promise Your saving help in every time of need. Therefore we lift up our hearts to You.

We thank and praise You that You have enabled us to understand Your Word, and for the blessings of faith, love, and trust in You. Most of all, we thank and praise You for the coming of Your Son, and for His deliverance from our sin, from the condemnation of the Law, from our death, from the devil, and from hell. We give You humble thanks for all Your other gifts You have bestowed on us through Jesus, Your holy Anointed One. Through Your Spirit give us a deeper knowledge of Your will, and a deeper faith in Your salvation. Continue to renew us by the Spirit also. Give us deeper love for all people. Keep us conscious of Your desire that we should spread the Good News about Jesus. Give us opportunities to tell the good news of the Gospel, and the courage to tell it; and strengthen us by the presence of Jesus, who has promised to be with us always in this task. Make us more aware of people's needs, that, in meeting them, they may see that we are credible witnesses of Him; and bless what we say.

We pray also for all our families. Bless each home with Your presence and the Spirit of Christ, that children may grow in favour with God and man, and that parents, by love and proper example, may maintain their homes in godliness. Grant that both children and parents may be eager to worship You, and may delight in serving Your Son in their daily lives.

Provide and maintain good government for us and for all people; give all in our nation high moral values and responsible citizenship.

Comfort and bless all among us who are afflicted in any way, that they may find release from their burdens and trials, and learn to know Your gracious will, and how to submit to it.

May we all, in the unity of the faith, and in the knowledge of Your Son, continually praise Your name and fulfil Your saving purposes in the world. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Jeremiah 1:4-19

<sup>4</sup> The Word of the LORD came to me, <sup>5</sup> “I knew you before I formed you in the womb. I consecrated you before you were born. I have made you a prophet to the nations.”

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, I said: “Alas, O Lord GOD! Look! I do not know how to speak. For I am only a youth.”

<sup>7</sup> However, the LORD told me: “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth!’ For you shall go to everyone to whom I send you and say whatever I command you! <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them! For I am with you to rescue you,” the LORD declared.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth. The LORD told me: “Look! I have put My Words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See! Today I have appointed

you to be over the nations and the kingdoms, to pull out by the roots and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant. ...

<sup>17</sup> “However, you must tuck your tunic into your belt! Get up and tell them everything that I Myself shall command you. Do not be intimidated in front of them, that I may not shatter you in front of them! <sup>18</sup> Look! Today I Myself have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its officials, against its priests and against the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> They will fight against you but will not defeat you. For I am with you,” declares the LORD, “and I shall rescue you.”

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

<sup>31b</sup> I shall also show you what the best way is by far.

<sup>13:1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> Even if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and, if I have all faith so that I could remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all that I possess to feed the hungry and, if I give up my body to be burnt and do not have love, I gain nothing at all.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious. It does not brag or become conceited. <sup>5</sup> It does not behave dishonourably. It is not selfish. It does not become irritated. It keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> It does not delight in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It covers everything in silence; it believes everything; it hopes for everything; it endures everything.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be ended. If there are tongues, they will cease. If there is knowledge, it will be ended. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and prophesy in part. <sup>10</sup> However, when what is complete comes, what is in part will be ended. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, think like a child and reason like a child. Now that I have become a man, I have ended childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see dimly in a mirror but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part but then I shall know just as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> Moreover, now there remain these three: faith, hope and love. However, the greatest of these is love.

Luke 4:31-44

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