

Resources - *A Question of Authority*

<https://youtu.be/V55biJHbWcU>

4th Sunday after Epiphany, Year B,

31st January, 2021

1 Corinthians 8 CEV / Mark 1:21-28 CEV

Prelude *There's Something About That Name*

written by Gloria and William Gaither,
played by church musician Annie Center,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

<https://youtu.be/2Kqy4D2ySKU>

Intro / Call to Worship

As people, as a group, as a community of faith –
we gather in this place.

To listen.

to speak.

to worship.

to pray.

to be with God. Because we know –

it is out of God's authority, it is out of God's love, that we live.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church.

We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today, let's begin by reflecting how we relate to and support each other when we struggle through the difficult patches of life, as we listen to this beautiful song by Mutual Kumquat.

Reflection video *Will You Let Me Be Your Servant*

(*The Servant Song*), performed by Mutual Kumquat,
used with permission

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANZ3K6JxkwY>

Invocation

Loving God, whose touch can heal the broken places of life, touch us today...
God of peace, whose spirit of peace can quiet our spirits of confusion and despair,
reassure us today...

Forgiving God,
whose call to repentance promises grace upon grace, place your mercy in our souls
today...

You who heal the sick and liberate the imprisoned, who bring justice in the midst of
oppression and strength in the midst of weakness, pour out your spirit of power
upon us today.

Open our hearts to new faithfulness, redirect our waywardness,
and hold us gently in your goodness.

We confess our need to you, and we turn to you with hearts filled with hope,
remembering the promises you have made to us.

May your name be glorified in us and through us. We ask it through Christ Jesus,
your only begotten son, he who is our Lord and our Saviour, our brother and our
friend. **Amen.**

**We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding
our time together. (light candle) Amen.**

**In our Epistle reading from first Corinthians today, we hear Paul's advice to the church at
Corinth on how to support our brothers and sisters in the faith who struggle. As we
listen to these words, let's think about how we can reach out to those we know who
may have a different understanding than ourselves.**

Epistle Reading 1 Corinthians 8 CEV

In your letter you asked me about food offered to idols. All of us know
something about this subject. But knowledge makes us proud of ourselves,
while love makes us helpful to others.

In fact, people who think they know so much don't know anything at all.

But God has no doubts about who loves him.

Even though food is offered to idols, we know that none of the idols in this world are alive. After all, there is only one God.

Many things in heaven and on earth are called gods and lords, but none of them really are gods or lords.

We have only one God, and he is the Father. He created everything, and we live for him. Jesus Christ is our only Lord. Everything was made by him, and by him life was given to us.

Not everyone knows these things. In fact, many people have grown up with the belief that idols have life in them. So when they eat meat offered to idols, they are bothered by a weak conscience.

But food doesn't bring us any closer to God. We are no worse off if we don't eat, and we are no better off if we do.

Don't cause problems for someone with a weak conscience, just because you have the right to eat anything.

You know all this, and so it doesn't bother you to eat in the temple of an idol. But suppose a person with a weak conscience sees you and decides to eat food that has been offered to idols.

Then what you know has destroyed someone Christ died for.

When you sin by hurting a follower with a weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

So if I hurt one of the Lord's followers by what I eat, I will never eat meat as long as I live.

Scripture Video

1 Corinthians 8 - *Limits To Liberty*

Lectionary bible reading

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XE_oJc2ccg

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in

our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning, let's remember Bill and JoAnn Shoemaker in our prayers as they continue to struggle, as many of us do, with the isolation of quarantine in their living situation. Bill has been particularly struggling with his mobility in the absence of regular therapy and exercise.

Let's also remember those among us struggling with depression and self worth. May God work in their lives to bring comfort and peace, and a recognition of the beauty within

We also lift up those who struggle with physical pain and disease. May they find healing and strength.

Finally, we remember those of worldly authority among us. May God guide them in working together to seek solutions to the problems we face, always with the "least of these" in the forefront of their minds.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

What have we done, Lord? We want to praise you, so we splash your words on screens on a wall, with brightly colored and powerful images. We shout your praises, with hands held on high. We teach and preach your word. But we don't listen carefully for you. We are so busy trying to shout above the noise of the day, that we don't take time to really listen and know you. The voices of the prophets spoke to people long ago who were too busy and anxious to hear. Their words streamed in the winds of time and have come to us. We need to pay attention to your message offered through them. You are our God, the God of all creation, the God of power and love, whose mercy is offered to us. In Jesus' time, he proclaimed the good news through words and actions, reaching out to those who were troubled, alienated, cast aside. He offered healing and hope to those others turned away. Help us to learn that you alone can heal us and fix those areas in our lives that are wounded and twisted. Help us to understand that you alone can offer to us a new way of life through Jesus Christ. Remind us again that as we have spoken the names of people and situations that concern us, praying for your healing touch, that the same touch is

offered to us in Jesus' name. Lord, we need to let go of our control issues and place our trust wholly in you. Now and forever. **Amen.**

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear the story of Jesus teaching with authority. As we listen to these words from Mark, let's give some thought to what authority we follow, and what authority we exercise.

Gospel Lesson Mark 1:21-28 CEV

Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Capernaum. Then on the next Sabbath he went into the Jewish meeting place and started teaching.

Everyone was amazed at his teaching. He taught with authority, and not like the teachers of the Law of Moses.

Suddenly a man with an evil spirit[a] in him entered the meeting place and yelled, "Jesus from Nazareth, what do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! You are God's Holy One."
Jesus told the evil spirit, "Be quiet and come out of the man!"

The spirit shook him. Then it gave a loud shout and left.

Everyone was completely surprised and kept saying to each other, "What is this? It must be some new kind of powerful teaching! Even the evil spirits obey him."

News about Jesus quickly spread all over Galilee.

Scripture Video Mark 1:21-28

The Healing Of One With An Unclean Spirit

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FpL0-AM09U>

Message – *A Question of Authority*

When we think of authority, what comes to our minds? I think for most of us, we think of someone with power, with influence over others or events. And how do "authority figures" get that power and influence? Certainly people with particular knowledge or training and experience gain authority by the assets they present in

certain situations. Judges, doctors, and scientists are some of those who came to my mind. Yet others hold authority based on their title, or the role they fill in various arenas. Politicians, nobility, management in all its various forms, and law enforcement are some examples of those who have that kind of authority. Now ideally, these people would also have the knowledge and experience to exercise that authority, but we all know that certainly is not always the case, is it?

But what about Jesus? What kind of authority does he represent? In our passage from Mark this morning, Jesus speaks “with authority” and a lot is made of how the people responded to his teaching in this story. We're told they were “amazed” and the contrast is made between the teachings of Jesus and the teaching of the scribes.

What made Jesus' teaching so different? The lessons the people were accustomed to from the scribes and the Pharisees were well-established. They followed an age-old pattern of Torah scholarship, where they examined one passage and compared it with other passages where the same vocabulary was used, and referenced the commentary of previous scholars on the same passage. It's a type of study called exegesis, and it is still in widespread use today, not only in Jewish study, but among Christian seminarians as well, myself included. It can be very informative about exactly what the vocabulary in a particular passage really means in the original text, and what it meant to the original context in which it was written. What it doesn't reveal is how to apply that meaning to our everyday behavior and how we live our lives. Certainly some texts are pretty cut and dry; like to be honest, treat others the way you would like to be treated, etc. But many are not so clear in their meaning and application.

This is where the “authority” with which Christ taught is different. His background as a Jewish man certainly included study of the Torah and taking his turn reading scripture in his local synagogue in Nazareth. He may have even had the opportunity for some rabbinical training in those lost years we know little about. So I'm sure he had a foundation in the more traditional method of teaching. But what made him different is his knowledge and revelation of the kin-dom of God, of God's intention with a particular scripture.

Jesus is the physical manifestation of God's kin-dom breaking through into this world. He speaks from that perspective and gives his audience clear answers for exactly what God's intention and meaning is in the scriptures he presents. Jesus tells them how to apply it to their real lives, instead of presenting an ideal, law-filled existence that they can never achieve. But it's not just in his teaching that this authority is demonstrated.

We also have the casting out of the “unclean spirit” in this story as well. Now for many in our age of scientific discovery and fact, demon possession is a troublesome element to some of the biblical stories, and can be a stumbling block to studying the scriptures for some. But again, perspective can play a big role in how we approach such stories. Yes, these stories were written down in a largely pre-scientific era, when the concept of possession would have simply been accepted as the norm, that such supernatural occurrences were considered a valid explanation. And I am in no way saying one way or the other that such things are not possible. But what's important is the bigger struggle being portrayed in this story. Whatever was afflicting this man, it was of this world, it was a force that is in opposition to God and God's kin-dom. Jesus demonstrated that God is the superior power, the ultimate authority in this world as well as the kin-dom that drew near.

In the words of theologian Karl Barth, what “always takes place” in the miracle stories

is that “in and with them a completely new and astonishing light – and in all its different manifestations the same light – was cast on the human situation.” Barth's thoughts on Christ's authority can be summarized in a couple main concepts.

First, God is directly interested in people. Jesus consistently showed interest, care, and love for the humans he encountered. God's kin-dom is established in Jesus Christ, who enacts the mind and heart of God in the Gospel stories, and God's love for humans burns brightest in these miracle stories. Secondly, God is always at our side and all that causes suffering for us is painful, alien, and antithetical to God's intentions for us. God is with all who suffer and God through Jesus enters into our suffering with us. In his kin-dom activities, Jesus expresses a defiance of the power of destruction that enslaves humans in all its forms. In removing an unclean spirit, Jesus acts against the forces that would rob life of the fullness which God intends for us.

What are the forces today that rob us of the fullness of life that God intends? What influences of the world pull us away from God's intentions for our lives? We have many demons we struggle with in today's world. Our headlines are full of stories of addictions of all kinds: drugs, greed and consumerism, pride and nationalism, sex, power, the list goes on and on. Like the unclean spirit in our story today, our own demons are unique to us. They feed on our own weaknesses, our own submission to temptation in all its forms, which often manifest themselves in anger, violence, and despair. Yet we unlike the man in today's story, have four gospels full of Jesus' teaching with authority. We have access to many of the lessons he taught, insight into what the kin-dom he represented is all about.

The question is, how do we use that knowledge? Do we make the effort to let the beatitudes and lessons of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7 guide our lives? Do we take seriously the call in Matthew 25 to care for the least of these? And do we pride ourselves on our material success, or in our servanthood of all, as Christ teaches in Matthew 20. In case you haven't noticed, I tend to favor Matthew's gospel. So if we are called to be servants to each other, that greatness is in our service to others, how should we handle those among us who struggle?

Paul, in today's lesson from 1 Corinthians gives some insight into that very question. In Corinth, there were many members of the early church who were from the educated, sophisticated upper classes who worshiped alongside those of lesser means and education, who belonged to the working classes of that society.

Those schooled in Greek philosophy from the upper crust often had an easier time discerning the finer points and nuances of Christ's teachings as related by Paul, and they were better able to apply those lessons to their daily lives than those who did not have the benefit of such an education.

Today's lesson focused on the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul knew that the elite in the group grasped that idol gods don't exist, and therefore meat sacrificed to them is not tainted in God's eyes. God is certainly not a fan of the actual idol worship, but that meat is meat, and to waste that resource would be sinful. However some among the working class couldn't get past the point that they still felt they were slipping back to their past lives of idol worship by consuming such meat. Paul's point to those who understood his teaching on the matter was that even if they had a deeper understanding of a theological concept, if their practice of that understanding caused stress or tension for a fellow church member, it was better to abstain than to make them feel tempted and sinful. Paul tells us that those among us who struggle are members of our family, and that our focus should be on serving them by helping to strengthen their faith, not by letting them struggle unnecessarily.

How do we see that in the church today? Are there those who struggle with how others live out their faith? What about those who struggle with their own demons, because they lack self-worth and forgiveness and can't see the free grace that God offers all of us? Paul would tell us that it is our duty to seek out those very people who struggle, and not to hold our own faith and understanding over them, to "puff ourselves up", but to be humble, to show compassion and understanding to those who not only struggle with their own demons, but struggle with our other's expression and understanding of their faith. Paul rightly understood that this discord

and lack of understanding can tear faith communities apart. Every congregation I have been a member of or served at has suffered a painful rift because of different understandings of faith and scripture and what it means to practice that faith.

Our own denomination, the Church of the Brethren, is currently experiencing such a rift over biblical interpretation. The question is, by what authority do we operate in our own faith lives? Are we holier than thou and let our weaker sisters and brothers struggle? Or are we willing to make our own sacrifices, to show forbearance with one another for the common good? Do we speak from a compassionate, caring kin-dom perspective as Christ, or from a loftier place of pride?

I'd like to close today with a quote from Readers Digest about giant sequoia trees. The giant sequoias of California have very shallow root systems...their roots extend just barely below the surface. It sounds impossible because we all know trees need deep roots to withstand drought and wind, but sequoias are most unique. They only grow in groves where their roots intertwine and their limbs interconnect with each other. When strong winds blow, they hold each other up. This is the way the church is designed. Without the help of others to keep roots firmly planted, with no support from others, the individual Christian will soon fall. Like sequoias, we grow tall when we stand together and support each other. Will we grow together and thrive, or will we pull apart and collapse? Will we speak with the authority of God's kin-dom revealed through Christ, or will we take pride in our own perspective over that of others? What choices will you make? Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought as to what authority guides our lives, and how we use the authority we've been given with others.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [Video] *For The Healing Of The Nations*

by Fred Kaan and Henry Thomas Smart,
played by church musician Annie Center,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

<https://youtu.be/xKsudtv0xZ4>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving God,
you are never far from us, you are as close as our breathing.
We recognize you as the one who heals the wounded spirit
and gives new life to the broken hearted.
We offer these gifts to You, O God,
as a sign of our commitment to Your grace and authority.
Take us and use us and all that we have,
so that the Kingdom of Heaven will be realized on earth;
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing/Assurance

Go now, and heed God's message. Never forget God's wonderful mercy and kindness.

Welcome the freedom that is won in truth, but never use your freedom to undermine others. See that your words and actions are worthy of praise.

And may God uphold you in a lasting covenant. May Christ Jesus free you from all that would harm you. And may the Holy Spirit nourish you in wisdom and faithfulness.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude *Fairest Lord Jesus*

music by C.E. Haupt, arr. By Lee Evans,
performed by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/rUPBaRwsvP8>