



Epiphany 4-January 31, 2021  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
Mark 1:21-28

## “Having Authority”

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from his son Jesus Christ our strength and our Redeemer.  
Amen*

*In the first lesson for today from Deuteronomy, the Lord told Moses that he would raise up a prophet. This prophet would be given words that would be put in his mouth from the Lord himself to speak. Moses wasn't having great success commanding God's chosen people to follow the commandments that the Lord had given him on Mt. Sinai. This new prophet would bring a new word. A word of promise which when spoken would always come true.*

*After Jesus had chosen his disciples they traveled north along the sea of Galilee and when they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. This is one of the few times that Jesus doesn't get into trouble on the Sabbath day. Usually, Jesus and his disciples are being watched and are confronted whenever they would break the rules of the sabbath. But today, Jesus is keeping the sabbath by doing what a rabbi should do on the sabbath. Teaching. We are told that those who heard what Jesus was saying were astounded. A better translation would say they were floored by what they heard. There was something different about the way Jesus taught. The best way that those who heard Jesus could compare his teaching with that of the scribes was that Jesus taught as one “having authority.”*

*They didn't say that all the other scribes were bad teachers. The difference was that they could tell that the scribes had first been taught themselves. They had been given authority to teach. They didn't have authority. But when Jesus opened his mouth to teach, they could tell that he WAS the authority.*

*One of my favorite professors at seminary had the most cluttered room of all professors at Sioux Falls Seminary. It was partially cluttered with ungraded papers that students had been waiting all semester to be graded and returned. But the greatest clutter was from his extensive collection of books. Dr. Strickland was an avid reader. He would read several books each week and then would pile them onto the already full bookshelves or would stack them anywhere there was an open space. As unorganized as his room appeared, he had an amazing ability to quickly find whatever book he was looking for. Whenever he came into class, he would have a stack of books under his arm to have available as references. He was an authority on many things including pastoral care, church leadership, and resolving conflict within churches. But it was clear that Dr. Strickland was given this authority. He received this authority by first learning it. He was like the scribes, or Moses, or me, or anyone of you. He was given the authority that he had.*

*The people that were astounded with the words of Jesus' teaching were also given an astounding illustration of his authority that day in the synagogue. We are told that “just then” after being astounded at his teaching, a person with an unclean spirit appeared in the synagogue and began to speak. It seemed that this demon possessed man somehow slipped by anyone who was guarding the entrance into this house of worship and interrupted Jesus the guest teacher that day. The people that were astounded at Jesus' teaching never called*

*Jesus by name. They were astounded, but they were still uncertain of who he was. But the unclean spirit within the man knew exactly who was teaching and knew about his authority. The unclean spirit confessed "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."*

*In a few words from Jesus, the unclean spirit's question about if Jesus was going to destroy them became clear. Jesus doesn't allow any other voices to be listened to when he is speaking. The first step Jesus took is to destroy the spirit was to silence the unclean spirit. Jesus said, "Be silent" and the spirit who entered the synagogue speaking, now had been shut up. Then when there is no confusion of who is speaking or competition from other voices. Jesus takes the next step and commands the unclean spirit to come out. There is also no question if the unclean spirit heard or listened to Jesus. There is a visual description of this exorcism as the spirit came out that everyone witnessed with amazement. After seeing the unclean spirit depart, they asked, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." After this event, we are told that the fame of Jesus began to spread around the region of Galilee.*

*This fame that Jesus gained was not because of what was seen that day. The root of this word "fame" deals with the sense of hearing, not sight. People were astonished by the authority Jesus had when he spoke. When Jesus told the unclean spirits to be silent and to come out, they shut up and came out. It is this fame of what Jesus' spoken word still accomplishes today.*

*You and I of course do not have Jesus in the flesh in worship today. But as it wasn't the sight of Jesus' authoritative word that amazed the people of that day, it was his words. As you heard in the first lesson for today, you will know that a prophet or preacher of God's word has spoken God's word and not his own because it comes to pass. It was obvious when Jesus rebuked the unclean spirits in the synagogue that day, the people believed the person had been delivered from those evil spirits.*

*You too have witnessed such an event last week at Baltic and you will again at East Nidaros today. You may not have told others last week that you witnessed an exorcism during worship in Baltic last week or probably will not tell others that you witnessed an exorcism at East Nidaros today. But Baptism is nothing less than an exorcism. It is by God's authoritative word that a child of God is released from the bondage of Satan.*

*I suspect you too would be a bit more amazed if Jesus were here in person today. You would notice that Jesus had the authority compared to someone who was given the authority. But when the words of promise have been put in your mouth by God, they will do exactly what they say. When a child of God is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the devil is no longer welcome in the life of this child. Once God has declared a person a Beloved Child, the devil has no more to say. When you have been forgiven in Jesus' name and become an inheritor of the kingdom of God, that is exactly what happens.*

*Jesus called his disciples, and he has called you to speak his words. You might not look like someone who would have the authority like Jesus, but again it is not your appearance that will determine if your words are from God. It is from the words you hear and the words you speak. As we pray the Lord's prayer again today, we will pray that our trespasses will be forgiven as we forgive those who trespass against us. You too have been given this authority to forgive and when God's word of forgiveness that has been given to you is spoken to others, the results are certain, and they are amazing. Amen.*

