

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 4B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Fourth Sunday After Epiphany - Year B
28th January 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the living God! OR

18 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

157 STF – God has spoken - by his prophets OR

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come

Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Hymn:

75 STF – From all that dwell below the skies OR

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

666 STF – Master, speak! Thy servant heareth OR

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

670 STF – We have nothing to give that didn't first come from your hand OR

338 STF – There is a redeemer

Blessing

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Call to worship

Love comes amongst us, as we gather.
Love transforms our hearts, as we pray and sing.
Love moves us into action.
Lord Jesus, Spirit of love,
Show us how to love, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the living God! OR
18 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Opening Prayers

Hush.
Be still.
Listen.

Do you hear them?
The sounds of the prophets, sharing wisdom
through the voices of the children, the downtrodden,
the faithful, the thunder of the crowd,
the whisper of those here.

Hush.
Be still.
Listen.

Can you feel it?
The drums of praise, echoing in this space.
The ensemble has gathered to bring worship,
like the psalmist of old,
in the people gathered here.

Hush.
Be still.
Listen.

Can you see it?
The burdens we have brought here,
the anxiety of this past week,
the rising joy needing to be shared,
the Spirit of God in this place?

Be still.
Come.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

This house and community welcome you.
In unity, we praise.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Our New Testament reading from Mark 1:21-22 gives us a story from the Bible that reminds us that Jesus had power and authority. Jesus was and is a teacher who could control anything, yet cared for each individual and demonstrated his love through his actions. In the Gospel of Mark, we see him heal someone from an evil spirit.

Here is a little bit of the gospel reading that we will hear later in our service:

'And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.' Mark 1:21-22

Jesus began his earthly ministry by teaching people in the local areas. Some were sceptical about who he was, but many people noticed how he spoke like someone who knew what he was talking about. He had authority when he taught and instructed people.

It wasn't just knowledge; it was a power that made people sit up and take notice. And when confronted with an impure spirit, Jesus didn't negotiate or plead; he commanded the spirit to leave, and it had to obey.

This event tells us something important about Jesus. He has authority over all things, even the forces that try to harm us. It's like Jesus is saying, "I am in control, and nothing can stand against my power."

Can you imagine that level of power? Maybe you might want to chat with your neighbour about what that level of power on your side can do for you?

[Give people space to chat. Take some reflections from people in the congregation.]

So, as we go from here today, let's be encouraged by the authority of Jesus. Whatever challenges you are facing this week, may you remember that he is in control, and his power and love are with us now and wherever we go.

Amen.³

Hymn:

157 STF – God has spoken - by his prophets OR

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Hymn:

75 STF – From all that dwell below the skies OR

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father

Reflections on the readings

Where does authority come from?

When we think of the authority figures in our lives, we might think of the Prime Minister, our boss at work, or perhaps the minister of your church.

But why do these people hold authority over us? In these cases, authority comes from a role that these people hold – a position in an organisation or hierarchy. But as we've probably all experienced, this kind of authority can be volatile.

A role or position only really holds any power at all if enough other people recognise and respect it.

How often is the sacking of a football manager preceded by the allegation that they have "lost the dressing room"? The manager is still in the position of authority but the players have stopped listening to them.

A criticism that is often levelled against governments from the opposition party of the day is that they are "in office, but not in power." They have the *position* of authority, but not the respect or consensus to make use of it.

These examples show us that authority that comes from a role is not inherent or fixed, but flexible and losable. Being in a position of authority is not the same as commanding authority.

This passage invites us to look at a different kind of authority – the kind that Jesus possesses.

We read in verse 22 that the people in the synagogue were astonished because Jesus "taught as one with authority, and not as the scribes." The implication here of course is that the scribes did *not* teach with authority.

Is it the case that first century Jews weren't listening to anything their religious leaders were telling them? Of course not. But when the scribes were teaching in the synagogues, they were relying on the authority of the Torah itself and their interpretation of it, not claiming they had any personal authority themselves.

In history lessons at school, you were probably taught about primary and secondary sources. A primary source is something that provides first-hand information about an event, whereas a secondary source is later commentary or analysis of that event. For example, a primary source about the Great Fire of London would be Samuel Peyp's diary because he was actually there. A secondary source would be a book written by a modern historian about the events of 1666.

The reason those listening to Jesus were so shocked was because Jesus speaks as if he is a primary source of authority, not a secondary one. He is not offering speculative interpretation, he is offering fact.

The next part of the passage reveals why Jesus is able to claim such authority. It might be tempting to think Jesus' authority comes from the fact he can cast out

demons. After all, that is what the onlookers seem to conclude – by the end of the passage they are saying “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” But this is a classic case of arriving at the right answer with the wrong working. After all, in the gospels we see Jesus sending out others to cast out evil spirits as well. The real moment of revelation comes when the unclean spirit cries out “I know who you are – the Holy One of God.”

This is why Jesus can teach with such authority – because he is the Holy One of God. He *is* a primary source.

Jesus’ authority comes not from his position in a hierarchy, or from the respect his teachings have gathered, but from *who he is*. And because his identity is the source of his authority, it is irrefutable, not contingent like the authority that comes from a position someone is put in.

But what difference does this make for us? Why does it matter where Jesus’ authority comes from?

It matters because Jesus’ identity is what allows us to trust and commit to his teachings wholeheartedly. If Jesus was simply an exceptional scribe or outstanding rabbi, then there is no reason to trust him beyond the merits of his arguments themselves. His authority as the Word of God is what elevates his teaching above any other we might possibly hear. No matter how impressive, inspirational, or useful we find other learnings that we come across, nothing can carry the weight of the words of Jesus himself.

And the exciting thing for us as Christians is that the Bible is a primary source about Jesus, and Jesus is a primary source about God. The words of Jesus, as recorded in the gospels, are the singularly most authoritative thing we can possibly have access to. Not only that, but we can have a direct relationship with Jesus through prayer. We have an extraordinarily direct line to the extraordinary authority that Jesus possesses.

And yet – even with that extraordinary access, this passage contains a warning not to be too confident in our own ability to discern what God is saying.

It is hard to ignore the fact the unclean spirit knew of Jesus’ identity when the disciples and those in the synagogue did not. Those who were most committed to Jesus’ teachings failed to recognise the most important thing about him. It was an unclean spirit, something most in need of transformation, that knew the truth.

It is a reminder, if one is needed, that theological authority does not reside solely in the church.

Within the brokenness of the world, and within the brokenness of people who do not even accept Jesus as Lord, sometimes lies truth that we in the church have failed to see and grasp.

Questions for Reflection

What does it take for you to recognise someone’s authority?

Why does who Jesus is make a difference?

What does it look like to treat Jesus as our primary authority?

Where might we find and encounter important truth outside of the church?⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Cameron Hume

Hymn:

666 STF – Master, speak! Thy servant heareth OR

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you sent your Son to be your representative on earth, carrying all the same authority as you. Thank you that in the Bible we have the means by which to hear and respond to your authority. Help us to use the access we have to your word, to draw near and listen to your authoritative voice to us.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, we recognise the times where we have failed to treat you as the primary authority in our lives. Where we have given greater power to people and things that do not help build up your Kingdom on Earth. As we are bombarded with information and opinion every day, help us to keep our eyes fixed on you – our greatest authority.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who feel overburdened and trapped by something out of their control, those who have worries so large they feel insurmountable. Lord, in your power, rebuke that which is not of you, and make quiet the voices within us that keep us from our full potential.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We are sorry for the times that we are arrogant and foolish enough to think we have all the answers. Help us to recognise the wisdom and truth that we can find when we venture beyond our church walls.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We take a moment to think of the situations in our world and our community where we want your love and peace to reign.

Leave a moment of silence

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you Lord, for all these gifts, for all that we are able to give to you today, and in the days and weeks to come. Help us to receive your love, that we might be able to share it better with those around us. Move through us by your divine spirit of love, we pray.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Cameron Hume

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

670 STF – We have nothing to give that didn't first come from your hand OR

338 STF – There is a redeemer

Blessing

Go in peace – seek the opportunities to love. Go in joy and be the people who bring hope. Travel well in the world, and be transformed by the Spirit within you.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker