

1.31.21 Ep4 Christ's Authority and Our Responsibility

- Today we have two scripture readings. One is straightforward and easy to understand, while the other seems confusing and convoluted – but both readings are important
- The straightforward reading from the Gospel of Mark is a story about Jesus's authority
 - It seems that one Sabbath day Jesus went to the synagogue and there he taught
 - But when JESUS taught and preached, he didn't sound like the scribes or the rabbis – that is he didn't sound like the preachers and pastors of his day – when Jesus taught there was a sense of authority to his words unlike anyone else
 - And then when he had finished preaching, a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit cried out that Jesus was the Holy One of God, but Jesus silenced him by commanding the Spirit to come out of him... and it did
 - Authority to preach and teach unlike anyone else, and the authority to command an unclean spirit to come out – JESUS HAD THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF GOD
 - Now of course as people who have been able to read to the end of the gospels, and as people who have heard the death and resurrection of Jesus proclaimed not only on Good Friday and Easter, but each and every Sunday... as people whose very faith and lives have been claimed and shaped by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, we know the wonderment of Jesus' listeners who heard Jesus' authoritative words, and the amazement of the witnesses who saw the authority of Jesus' word cast out demons... we know that the authority of Jesus's words and actions point to the greater authority that Jesus embodied when he gave himself over to death, and then broke the bonds of death and conquered death itself with his own resurrection
- It's pretty straightforward – the authority of Jesus' words and actions point to the even greater authority made known in his cross and resurrection that conquers sin and death
- In the face of that authority that can only reside in the Holy One of God, crucified and raised, *then we can only be humble...*

we can only be humble and realize that we have little or no authority on our own

- And that brings us to the less straightforward lesson – a reading that seems convoluted and confusing to us
 - Paul’s letter is about whether or not to eat meat that has been offered in pagan temples to pagan idols
 - This sure doesn’t seem very relevant today... but indeed, it is
 - So here’s a quick summary of the situation – in the days of the early church, when Saint Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, it was a common practice throughout the Roman empire to sacrifice a lot of animals at the altars of idols, and then afterwards, the meat would be shared in a big, cheap meal that anyone could stop by and eat
 - So knowing that the Roman gods did not exist, and only that the God of Israel and the early church exists, what could it hurt... what could it hurt to eat the meat, or join in the meal of a non-existent god?
 - After all the food was plentiful, and the meat was cheaper than in the market!
 - And so Paul said that they were right – there was no harm to their faith to eat food that had previously been sacrificed and to false idols, BUT while it might not hurt them, *it could hurt the conscience or the faith of their other sisters and brothers in Christ*
 - If you know that a pagan god did not exist, then eating food offered to it was not an act of worship
 - HOWEVER if you were a new Christian, and your faith was young and fragile, you might be disturbed, you might even start to feel that there were gods other than Jesus crucified and raised, and you might be lured into worship
 - So Saint Paul concludes with this word to people who were strong in faith and were free to eat food offered to idols: “...by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.
Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat

meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall. [8:11-13]”

- Today we don't have to worry about eating meat that was previously offered to idols, and in doing so, causing our brothers or sisters in Christ to stumble
- However, Saint Paul's line of argument – his emerging Christian ethic is so very important even now
 - Think about all the occasions when people, many of them who are Christians, claim some kind of right or privilege or freedom, regardless of the impact it may have on others
 - It's my money, *so it doesn't matter* what car or truck buy, and what mileage it gets or how much it pollutes
 - It's my right to free speech, *so I can say* or tweet anything I want
 - It's my face, *so I will decide* whether or not to wear a mask
 - For Christians, Saint Paul reminds us that nothing is just about me – it's always about my sisters and brothers in Christ, and my neighbors, and not causing them to fall or to stumble
- The authority in our lives does not reside within in us – we live under the authority of Jesus Christ, AND in all humility, we are called to live in ways that do not cause others to fall or stumble, and instead we are called to walk alongside and even protect, the weak and most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers, and neighbors