

Question Authority

[Mark 1:21-28](#)

Remember the bumper sticker that was popular for a while – “question authority”? The founding of this nation comes out of rebellion, out of questioning the authority of the British and the French and it is a strong strand in our collective psyche. Here in Los Osos we questioned the authority of the Regional Quality Water Board for decades, and even St. Ben’s once challenged the authority of the diocese. So questioning authority is nothing new to us.

But in the unraveling that happens every five hundred years or so and is upon us now, in the great religio-socio-political remix – authority and truth have come to the fore. What is truth and on whose authority is it truth? Does authority come from an external source like the Constitution, the Bible or an external person like the Pope or the President; or does authority reside within the individual and their own conscience?

This year in our gospel readings we are following the Gospel of Mark. We follow a three-year pattern which is used by most mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic church where we read Matthew in Year 1, Mark in year 2 and Luke in year 3: John gets woven in and around the others; so this year is Mark. It’s the shortest gospel and probably the first to be written. Mark’s project is to show the authority of Jesus the Christ, and so we are going to be hearing a lot about him casting out demons.

Mark is very clear that Jesus is the Holy One who has been given authority over unclean spirits. This will be demonstrated most clearly at his resurrection. Through his willingness to live a life of complete integrity following the path that God lays out for him – Jesus ends up being killed. Not directly by individual evil spirits but by the evil that manifests itself in human society in subtle and not so subtle ways.

Killing Jesus was one of the not-so-subtle ways. But Jesus demonstrates that the power of God is not in striking back but in coming back in love. Jesus' authority over even the power of death is demonstrated in his resurrection.

And it doesn't stop there because as we say in the Nicene Creed "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." Jesus the Christ was the very beginning of creation and he is the culmination of creation – Revelation calls him the Alpha and Omega – the A and Z of the cosmos.

This idea that Jesus the Christ will come again to judge the world is a troubling one for many of us. The early church believed that a literal end of the world would happen any moment, coming as unexpectedly as a thief in the night and yet paradoxically you would see the signs of its coming. Two thousand years later we are still waiting, and many people continue to scan for signs that it is coming any day.

I wonder if we have taken this all too literally. We now understand that time and space are intricately linked, and we can no more imagine being outside the space/time continuum than a fish can imagine being outside of water. For a fish to be outside of water is death – we leave the space/time continuum through death. We don't know what is there just as the fish does not imagine life on land.

I wonder if the second coming happens in a different dimension totally outside of space/time, yet closely linked to this dimension. I wonder whether the authority of Christ who sits on the right hand of the Father is completely manifest in that dimension. In that dimension everything is in balance. In that dimension all the questions that plague us in human society are already resolved. In that dimension the kingdom or reign of Christ is totally established and has no end. We could call it Dimension 5+ but usually we call it heaven.

The project is to bring that world into space/time. And Mark declares that Jesus has somehow torn aside the fabric which separates the dimensions – which is in some ways only an illusion – that in Jesus, God stepped through the curtain and brought heaven to earth. And for Mark the way that we can see this is by acknowledging Jesus’ authority – the one who sits on the throne and corrects the balance so all is in perfect harmony, all is shalom – this Holy One – came into our limited space/time, came to earth so that we might realize that God is love and God has conquered evil.

And when we grasp that vision, then our purpose becomes clear. Our purpose, people of God, is to live in this dimension the reality of Dimension 5+, that authority is with Christ, not with human-built institutions, not with little human “kings”. Our purpose is to live that life now so that gradually it becomes manifest among us. And perhaps there will be an end of time, when the dimensions merge. I don’t know.

But I do know that the Church, the Body of Christ, the People of God is already living in the end times. Because these are the times after Jesus was revealed. Once he had been revealed by the unclean spirit “I know who you are, the Holy One of God,” there was no going back. ... They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

So the authority we bow to is the authority that comes from Christ; from Jesus. And we follow his new teaching by reading his words and watching his actions as reported to us by the gossellers. This is a very different authority than we are used to. Jesus did not take weapons to the Garden of Gethsemane – he thought about it but did not do so. He met the gang who came to arrest him with non-violence. Because to meet their violence and anger with violence and anger would have been to bow down to the authority of the sin matrix.

We have in this country, the extraordinary example of the Civil Rights movement, of people who trained themselves to respond non-violently to provocation, who never lost sight of the humanity of the people who bitterly opposed them and abused them. John Lewis said

I discovered that you have to have this sense of faith that what you're moving toward is already done. It's already happened. And you live as if you're already there, that you're already in that community, part of that sense of one family, one house. If you visualize it, if you can even have faith that it's there, for you it is already there.¹

That is how we get to live, People of God. We get to live, not waiting for the end times when the end of the world will come, but live in the reality that the reign of God is already done, already happened. And Christ's authority is complete. His reign will have no end.

All is well.

¹ Tippett, Krista. *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living* (p. 111). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.