

Pastor Keith E. Wiens

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Text: Mark 1:21-28

Epiphany 4

AUTHORITY AND YOUR LIFE

Jesus taught with authority! This morning I want to talk with you about authority. And the question I want you to ask yourself is this: will you let Jesus be the authority of your life?

Take a look at the word "authority." When you look at the word "authority," you see in it the shorter, root word "author." The dictionary says the word "authority" comes from the same Latin word from which we get the word "author," a word that means "create." That's what an author does - an author creates a story.

One of my favorite books is *The Hammer of God*, a novel about life in a country town in Sweden in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Bo Giertz is the author of the book. He is the one who created the story.

That's the way I like to think of authority. And so the question is - will you let Jesus be the author of your life? Will you let Jesus write the story of your life?

But before you answer, let me share a few comments about the changing nature of authority. People today want to choose their authorities. They are no longer content to have authority imposed upon them.

One of the most popular sources of knowledge today is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia. In the old days, when you picked up the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, you could be certain that each article was written by a respected "expert," a recognized authority. It is different with Wikipedia. Who writes the articles in Wikipedia? People like you and me. Anyone can add an article or edit an existing article. Wikipedia works by consensus rather than credentials, with users adding and modifying content while trying to reach a common understanding. And for the most part, it works great.

But notice the shift in the understanding of authority. It used to be that the authority was the one who had the most degrees, the most experience, the best resume. Now it can be anyone. People no longer want to have authority imposed upon them. They no longer accept something as true just because some "expert" said it is true. Rather, they want to determine for themselves what is true.

Back to Jesus. Is Jesus an authority because the church says so? Is Jesus an authority because the Bible says so? Is Jesus an authority because he demands to be recognized as an authority?

No, not at all. In this regard, Jesus is strikingly post modern. He doesn't impose his authority on us. He just quietly goes about helping us and invites us to trust him.

Today we heard the story of Jesus teaching in the synagogue and healing a man who had an unclean spirit. He commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man and the unclean spirit came out! Jesus told people about God, but more than that, he brought the presence and the power of God to people in very specific and practical ways. This time, he cast an unclean spirit out of a man. That's the way it is with Jesus. He loves people like you and me. He loves us enough to help us. He even went so far as to sacrifice his life on the cross for us.

This story we heard today is an example of what Jesus does over and over again. Over and over again Jesus casts unclean spirits out of people. Over and over again Jesus heals people. Over and over again Jesus helps people. I know, because he has come to my aid time and time again. He has rescued me and helped me experience the presence and power of God. Through Jesus, I know that God loves me with an amazing love that never stops.

And because of what Jesus has done for me, I want Jesus to be the authority of my life. I want Jesus to be the author of my life. I want Jesus to write the story of who I am and what I do.

And I invite you to let Jesus be the authority of your life. Let Jesus write the story of your life. Let Jesus show you how to live. Listen to him. Do what he says. Above all, trust him. Trust him, because he is here to help you. He is here to drive out the unclean spirits in your life. He is here to make you well and whole. He is here to give you life with God.

And the same is true for us as a congregation. The question is, will we let Jesus be our authority? When we make decisions, when we plan for the future, when we try to determine what kind of church we will be, it should not be a matter of what you want or what I want, but what Jesus wants. It is his vision that we should seek to see. It is his will that we should seek to implement. It is his mission that we should strive to do.

Authors write stories. Good authors write good stories. When it comes to writing the stories of people's lives and when it comes to writing the stories of what happens in churches, Jesus is the best! He is the authority! I pray that you will let Jesus be author of your life. And I pray that we will let Jesus be the author of what happens in this church.