**January 31, 2021 (4th Sunday after Epiphany)**

**St. Gabriel – Titusville**

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20, 1 Cor 8:1-3, Mark 1:21-28**

Opening Prayer: O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O lord, for your servants are listening. Amen.

1. Intro…

When my granddaughter Hannah was 3 years old, she came to spend the night with me. We always had lots of fun, playing games, baking cookies, etc. But this particular day, Hahhan (my otherwise perfect granddaughter) had committed some sort infraction for which I needed to scold her. She stomped out of the room returning shortly with big crocodile tears and a pouty face. “You’re not the boss of me!” She exclaimed. “My daddy is the boss of me!” She choked out.

Getting down eye level with her I lovingly explained that when she is at my house, I’m the boss. And furthermore, that as her daddy’s mommy, I am also the boss of him.

She seemed to take this under advisement and the rest of the day went smoothly.

Later than evening, my parents arrived.

While mom and I were busy in the kitchen, Hannah and great cap-paw appeared to be engaged in a serious conversation in the living room. After awhile, my dad, with a sheepish grin joined us in the kitchen. He told us that he had come to “tell Peggy Grandma not to be so mean to his great-granddaughter.”

Apparently the conversation they had was on Hannah’s genealogy. Yes, Great-cappaw was indeed my daddy and as such Hannah had deduced was therefore, my boss. At 3 years old, she had figured out the proper ***succession of authority.***

That’s really the point of our readings today…authority.

Our OT reading from Deuteronomy originally referred to the whole line of prophets who would succeed Moses, but eventually this text was taken to refer to a final, messianic prophet. The selection we heard today identifies Jesus with that prophet and links the authority with which Jesus teaches to the charismatic authority demonstrated by Moses and his successors.

In our NT reading, Paul tells the Corinthians that authority does not come from knowledge, *all of us possess knowledge, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.*  It is Jesus Christ.

Although we are still only in Chapter 1 of Mark’s Gospel, we have already heard the story of John the Baptist’s preaching, the baptism of Jesus, and the calling the first disciples. Today we hear how Jesus begins his ministry. How does it begin? With teaching. But not just with any kind of teaching, it is teaching unlike that of the scribes, it is teaching with **authority.**

Did you notice that Mark doesn’t tell us the content of Jesus’ teaching? It’s almost like Mark is saying “it’s not th message… it’s the messenger!” In Mark’s gospel what makes Jesus’ teaching authority is his person; his teaching is authoritative because of who he is – he is, as the unclean spirit pronounced: ***the holy one of God.***

I find it curious that it was not the *learned scribes* who proclaimed this. After all, the scribes were the respected, scholarly interpreters of Scripture. They’ve not just read the word, but are able to cite resources and quote well-known rabbis as their authorities. And they did this au nausea. *They had the knowledge.*

They are more familiar with the prophecy of Deuteronomy: The Lord said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.” I don’t know, maybe they thought one of them were to be raised up? But what they failed to recognize was what my granddaughter so simply figured out, *succession of authority.* And that succession was of the *Word made flesh and dwelt among us.*  This is why Jesus spoke with so much authority – his words were God’s words.

But it wasn’t just his manner of teaching that jolted people awake and grabbed their attention. Jesus complemented his teaching with miraculous signs. A man suffering from an evil spirit shouted out: **What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth!**

And Jesus responds with the power of his word: “Be quiet and leave him!”

Mark tells us that everybody was amazed, astounded, and they wonder “what is this new doctrine being revealed” “by this one who speaks and acts **with such authority.**” The news of this roving teacher, the itinerant rabbi, began to spread through the region.

What is the message for us today:

First of all….

Jesus is a powerful healer!!! The very first act of Jesus ministry is to point out the suffering and evil in the world, the brokenness. Not only does Jesus point this out, he enters into it! He helps us name it! He helps us acknowledge our own brokenness and our need for healing!!!

Secondly…

He continues to stand firm with us.. Jesus the Christ is the only sure thing in this unstable world.

Third…. Simply speaking the truth isn’t enough, words aren’t enough. We are called to **act** in response to the truth, not to just pay it lip service.

Jesus claimed his authority with scripture…he taught with personal authority and then he exercised his authority to heal.

A friend of mine shares her personal witness of these three truths:

Ella had been working as a lay minister for over 15 years. She had shifted from parish work to pastoral counseling when she was asked to help begin a healing ministry for post abortive women. It was not a political statement or judgment. It was an opportunity for women who felt a loss to come, share their story and receive a healing.

She, as a non-post abortive woman, would co-facilitate the 3 day retreat and provide support. Ten women courageously spoke of their private choice and secret burden. Ella’s reflection was on *Holy People*, one of her best writings ever – a classic. It was to be the final talk of the weekend. But she never gave it.

She stood in awe and humility as each woman brought forth their own brokenness and placed it at the altar in faith and in total belief that Christ would heal them. Ella had served the Lord and the church for almost two decades but her faith seemed to pale in comparison to theirs. Her prepared talk had skimmed over her own brokenness, dismissing the abuse she had suffered as a child it was only in hearing the stories of the others that she recognized her own failed attempt to cure herself of her own brokenness.

Escaping from group for just a little while, she went to a trusted colleague and shared her plight. He guided her into putting away her talk and encouraged her to be authentic to her own story, to the women and to the Lord.

Leaving her papers behind, she joined the other women and surrendered to the healing authority of Jesus.

“only Jesus has the authority to give meaning to life and to heal the broken.”

The Gospel is always the good news. But before we are in it, we don’t see it as good. To find meaning in life, to experience healing of that which is broken, we have to submit to his authority. And it is the gift where we find the meaning and everlasting joy that cmes through Jesus Christ . Amen!!