

„Very unpleasant topic” Mark 1:21-28

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.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

First, let’s have a little review from the previous time, for this passage follows directly after the one we meditated upon the last time. Remember, we looked at the message of Jesus Christ, the way He began His ministry.

“The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, therefore – repent and believe in the Gospel.” The time is fulfilled for the Son of God is born, your Redeemer; the Kingdom of God is at hand, for He has begun His reign.

His reign is not external reign, He reigns by changing your hearts with His love. That’s how He builds His kingdom, by loving you until your heart is changed.

But then there are two commands. Repent! Not from something specific. No, repent, realizing that God sees your heart and mind. ‘Repent’ means change your mind to see yourself as God sees you, and then – believe in the Gospel!

Remember, this is the key. To believe *in the Gospel*. Our faith as such is not important. Only the object of our faith matters.

Even if your faith is as little as a little spark, as a mustard seed, but this is true faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He will save you from sin and death, whatever weak is your faith. This is what matters, - to believe in the Gospel.

But today we have a different topic. I would say – rather unpleasant topic. This topic is authority. Yes, what an unpleasant word. Especially in our Western culture where so much is done so that everyone could consider only themselves the highest authorities.

But this whole passage is about Jesus authority, about God’s authority. We will look at these events as described by Mark and will try to see, whether and how they are important for us today.

But let's talk about authority first – what is it? I think we could simply describe authority saying that you see it expressed when people listen. When someone in authority speaks, then people listen. They don't argue, they listen and obey.

One in the authority speaks, and things happen. This is not simply about hearing what is said, but actually obeying it. And we can see different authorities around.

There is authority of money, and of fame. These days we can see it quite often, when people listen attentively to someone simply because they are rich or famous, it almost grants them license to be experts in all fields. This is ridiculous, of course.

Then there is the authority of experts, when they have a wealth of knowledge in particular field, or authority of charismatic leaders who can grab your attention and exercise authority by virtue of their personalities.

Then there is the authority of the office, or of calling. Children listen and obey to parents. Employees listen and obey to employers. Citizens listen and obey to governments. Then there is the authority of the law, all people are under it, and don't you dare to try to challenge it.

But then, there is one authority which is above all of these, which easily overrules all of them. Do you know what it is? Yes, it is the divine authority. God's authority, the authority of God the Creator.

When and how does this one come into play? When God speaks His will and everything and everyone obeys it. We can see it in two ways. The first one is in the nature. God speaks and entire creation obeys Him.

Christian scientists introduced this term, the laws of nature. This is what they are – God's commands to whom entire creation obeys. For it is quite clear that these so called laws are not a part of matter, or energy, or space or time.

No, they are instruction to which entire creation obeys. They are the laws set forth by the Divine Lawgiver. He spoke, He commanded with His authority and everything in creation obeyed and still obeys Him.

Thus by His Word God creates, orders and sustains this Universe. This is how God speaks with His authority in creation, but - He also speaks directly to us. This is the second way we are exposed to His authority – when God speaks directly with us.

And this is where our today's focus will be. This is what this passage from Mark's gospel is about. Let's look at it and see what we can learn from it. **“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.”**

This obviously was Jesus custom, - on the Sabbath He went to the synagogue. According to their tradition Jesus begun to teach. Mark didn't describe what exactly Jesus was teaching.

But He introduced the summary of Jesus message a few verses earlier as we read it the last week. "Repent and believe in the Gospel!" We can also read in Luke where Jesus first address in the synagogue is recorded and where He claims to be the One on whom the Spirit of the Lord dwell.

The One who has come be bring on a new order, the Kingdom of God. He claimed to possess the highest authority. The Divine authority. These claims where revealed in a way He preached and taught.

Rabbis and teachers of the Word in those days usually appealed to other teachers trying to back what they said by authority of others. They could say something along these lines.

'Rabbi Hillel taught that we need to repent for this will purify our soul, and rabbi Shammai taught that we need to trust the Lord, for this is what Moses told us, for then we will receive the Lord's blessings.'

Then comes this Jesus and says: "I say to you – repent and believe in the Gospel!" And 'You have heard that it was said, but I say to you... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!'

And they were astonished at His teaching. Of course they were. "Astonished" could mean both positively amazed, overwhelmed but also alarmed, shocked. Probably we can apply both of these to the people in this synagogue.

Jesus was teaching them as one who had authority. **"And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him."**

This is a very interesting dialogue. While Jesus listeners had no idea who He was, the unclean spirit new exactly who He was. The Holy One of God.

We can see it in many places in the gospels, that unclean spirits right away recognized Jesus and were hostile towards Him. Thus one way to understand this event is simply restricting this dialogue to the encounter between Jesus and the powers of darkness.

But there is one more dimension. Once Jesus comes and speaks with authority all His adversaries are threatened. All of them. Who are His adversaries? All who do not do God's will. Who are God's adversaries? We all are...

Every person who rebel against God, who want be like god themselves, who ignores God's will even when it is clearly reveal – every such a person is – yes, God's adversary. As much as we rebel against God and ignore His will, we all are His adversaries.

The same was true with the people in that synagogue. Pious to some extent, religious, for they attended the synagogues, as we attend the church, but at the same time sometimes secretly, sometimes openly rebellious against God's authority.

And suddenly there is this One, who speaks with authority. Repent and believe in the Gospel! He speaks as if He knows everything we need to repent of. He doesn't negotiate and doesn't discuss how good it would be to repent.

No, He demands, He commands... and the people were astonished. **“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.””**

Yes, for He is God. Everything obeys Him. He is not under the laws of this Universe, He is the One who sets and maintains them. Unclean spirits, sicknesses, powers of nature, even death itself obeys His commands. They all are under His authority.

Now what does this mean for us, for you? A lot. Are you baptized? Yes. Are you made disciples of Christ? Yes. Are you sent to share His message? Yes. Then this is how you are supposed to share His message, - with the divine authority.

You all are sent to tell these words: “Repent and believe in the Gospel!” They are not your words, and you are not to tell them in your authority, but in Christ's authority. What does this mean?

I'll give you an example. If one child goes to another and says 'go and vacuum your room', what will happen? You tell me! Yes, at the best there will be no reaction, or there could be a nice argument. That's it.

Now, another picture. Mom says to one child 'go and tell your brother to vacuum his room'. What will happen? Mom's authority will do the work. This is not anymore simply one child telling another what to do, this is a messenger delivering a command in Mom's authority. Do you see the difference?

Now, this is important. This is exactly what you are called to do. To deliver the Father's message. To deliver God's message. When you speak with someone about Christ, this is not one level conversation between two children.

'I think about God this way... but I think this way'. No, we don't negotiate our message. We don't through God's authority away by simply engaging in conversation as if this is just an exchange of opinions.

If we do this, then we burry God's authority and then this is no wonder that others don't take our message seriously. How could they, why would they if we only share our opinions?!

On the other hand, if you deliver God's message and speak in His authority – this will always, always cause people to feel threatened or offended. It can't be otherwise, for this is a clash of two authorities. God's supreme authority on the one hand, and our rebellious self-consciousness on the other.

This is like speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit and addressing unclean spirit. You don't negotiate with unclean spirits. 'Would you like to let this person go from darkness to light, from your kingdom to the Christ? No? That's fine.'

There is nothing to negotiate. We command in the name of Christ! Only supreme authority of God's own message can bring someone out of Satan's hands into God's kingdom, not our humanly opinions.

Of course, no one likes to be told that there is higher authority, and that you are under it. So there is no way people can receive Jesus message without first letting God's authority to triumph over their own.

Before we have acknowledged God's authority, we are like children, playing in a sandpit, building palaces and creating our own stories. This is what we continue to do when we grow up; we still want to make up our own stories, believing that we are the highest authority, that we are in charge.

True God, as our parent, shows up and dismantles these stories, bringing us back to reality. This may be painful. Yes, sure. We don't want to lose our dream world. We want to be our own creators. But we need to be awoken. For our own good.

Because if we keep living in our false stories we will never find how much better the reality is. This parent, this Father, who intrudes in our stories and wakes us up, He does it to tell us: 'Stop fooling around in your sandpit!'

I'm giving you all that I have, I want you to have eternal live, to live with me, to rule this Universe, to understand all the mysteries of creation, to experience what the true love is, in joy and awe in my holy presence.'

This is why He comes to us, this is why He sends us to others. This is why we can and should speak in His authority. This is what I say to you today, on behalf of the One, who chose me, called me and sent me to you.

'You, my beloved child. I know you. All about you. All. But don't be ashamed and don't be afraid. I love you and forgive you everything, nothing holds you back, you are free to come to me, I give you eternal live, and no one will snatch you from my hand. You are mine. You are mine. Now and forever.'

Amen.