

"I don't know why I remember the episode so vividly," writes author King Duncan. "I remember so few instances from my childhood. But this one stands out. I couldn't have been more than five. We were members of a tiny rural church and our hymns came from a small hymnal. Worship was a bit emotional; the preacher a little loud. There was no formal liturgy. The pews were hard. There was no air conditioning. The windows were open. It was a hot summer morning. A couple of dogs lazed out on the front porch of the church. From time to time a portion of the message would be drowned out by a farm truck rattling by or a motorcycle. Then suddenly our worship was interrupted. A woman who lived near the church but was not a member of the church was standing at the door sobbing hysterically. "Somebody, please help," she cried from just outside the door. "There's been an accident," she said, "a man's hurt bad. He's lay in' in a ditch." "Some of the men rushed out to see what they could do. One of the women of the church rushed to this woman's side and tried to console her. "Come inside," the woman said calmly. "Oh, no," the distraught woman wailed, "I can't come in. I can't come in." And she rushed down the steps of the church and disappeared. And as far as I know, she never came in that church or any other church for the rest of her life. "I don't know what that woman's story was," says Duncan. "She was not a bad person as far as I know. But there was some reason she could not so much as place a foot inside a church."

It's fascinating some of the things we remember from our childhood.

One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority not as the teachers of the law. That's an interesting phrase: **"as one who had authority . . ."**

WHERE DOES AUTHORITY COME FROM? If you've ever been in the military or in a WELL-STRUCTURED business environment, you know where it comes from. It comes from rank or position in a hierarchy.

You've probably heard the story of a second lieutenant at Fort Bragg, N.C. who discovered that he had no change when he was about to buy a soft drink from a vending machine. He flagged down a passing private and asked him, **"Soldier, do you have change for a dollar?" "I think so," the private said cheerfully. "Let me take a look."** The second lieutenant drew himself up stiffly. "Soldier," he said, "that's no way to address an officer. We'll start all over again. Do you have change for a dollar?" **The private saluted smartly, looked straight ahead, and said, "No, sir!" In that situation, pulling rank backfired.**

Some people have authority because of their rank or position. Others have authority because of their personality, or their knowledge or their extreme competence.

AS A CARPENTER, JESUS HAD NO POSITIONAL AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNITY. *His authority came from his wisdom and knowledge and his competence at interpreting God's Word.* Even as a boy Jesus wowed people with his wisdom and his grasp of scripture. However, the people in Capernaum could not know that his authority came from a more important source. All they knew is that they had never heard an individual teach like Jesus taught. They said to one another, **"He teaches as one who has authority, not as the teachers of the law."**

But even Jesus got interrupted from time to time. This time it wasn't a woman standing outside the door of a church pleading for help, but rather it was a man in the synagogue who disrupted Jesus' teaching. **THIS IS SIGNIFICANT...FOR ALL THE NEEDY PEOPLE ARE NOT ON THE "OUTSIDE" OF THE CHURCH. YES, there are many people on the inside of the church who have very deep needs. Indeed, sometimes needy people are attracted to the church—LIKE YOU AND LIKE ME!!**

In today's Gospel, Mark tells us of a man who was "possessed by an impure spirit." We don't know what Mark meant by this. Most modern people dismiss the idea of demons and unclean spirits. We assume this is pre-scientific language for mental illness, but who knows? Whatever the origin of his problem, **obviously the man**

was deeply distressed. He cried out, *“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are the Holy One of God!”*

It’s interesting that the impure spirits recognized who Jesus was long before the people of Capernaum. *“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”* And then something remarkable happened. The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all amazed and they asked each other, *“What is this? A new teaching and WITH AUTHORITY!!* He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” And Mark tells us, *“News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”*

“What is this?” the people asked, “A new teaching and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”

So, Jesus had authority because of his teachings. But he also had authority because of his power over what Mark calls *“impure spirits.”* In other places we see his authority over disease, and over nature, and over death.

This brings us to something obvious we need to affirm about Jesus: HE WAS UNIQUE! There was no one quite like him.

There were other fine teachers in Galilee, but they could not cast out impure spirits, or turn water into wine or heal the leper or multiply the fishes and the loaves or forgive sins. There was something about Jesus which could not be said about his contemporaries. HE HAD AUTHORITY...*physical authority, spiritual authority, moral authority. Even after his death and resurrection, he had authority.* When confronted by someone who was demon-possessed or who was blind or physically-challenged, all the disciples had to do was evoke Jesus’ name and demons were cast out and the physically-challenged were made whole and the blind could see. **THAT IS AUTHORITY!!**

Singer and songwriter Gloria Gaither put it this way... as part of a musical that she and her husband Bill composed several years ago: *“Jesus. The mere mention of His name can calm the storm, heal the broken, raise the dead . . . I’ve heard a mother softly breathe His name at the bedside of a child delirious with fever, and I’ve watched that little body grow quiet and the fevered brow cool. I’ve sat beside a dying saint, her body racked with pain, who in those final fleeting seconds summoned her last ounce of ebbing strength to whisper earth’s sweetest name Jesus, Jesus . . . Emperors have tried to destroy it; philosophers have tried to stamp it out. Tyrants have tried to wash it from the face of the earth with the very blood of those who claim it. Yet still it stands . . . Jesus . . .”* FRIENDS, THAT IS AUTHORITY!!

UNLIKE MANY WHO HAVE COME AFTER HIM, THEY WILL TELL YOU, IT TOOK THE HUMBLE CARPENTER OF NAZARTH TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES WITH HIS “AUTHORITY.”

YES, ask **“Socrates who taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40 and Jesus for only 3 ½ years.** Yet the influence of Christ and his ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined years of teaching from these greatest of philosophers.

“Jesus painted no pictures, yet some of the finest artists such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration directly from Him.

“Jesus composed no music; still Handel, Beethoven, Bach and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the music they composed to Praise him.

“Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth.”

It took a Roman centurion, stationed at the foot of the cross who watched him die, to sum it all up, *“Surely this man,” the centurion testified, “was the Son of God!”* (Mt. 27-54)

No one else who has ever lived spoke with the authority with which Christ spoke. He was unique. There has never been another like him. **This brings us to two obvious questions:**

IF JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD...SHOULDN'T WE REFLECT ON WHO HE IS IN OUR LIVES??
IF JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD... SHOULDN'T WE ALLOW HIS WAYS TO BE OUR WAYS??

It is like the beggar in the movie "Monty Python's Life of Brian." Brian and his mother are walking through town and get hit up by a beggar. *"Alms for an ex-leper. Alms for an ex-leper, please."*

It is here that Brian says: *"What do you mean an ex-leper?"* And the leper says: *"Well I was cured" "Who cured you?"* Brian says. And the leper says: *"That Jesus fellow."* He says: *"Now I have a hard time making a living, all I've ever known how to do is beg."* And Brian says: *"Well why don't you go back and ask him to make you a leper again?"* And the leper says: *"Well, I might not like that. Maybe he could just make me a leper during working hours or something."*

So, Brian just sighs, drops a coin into his cup and walks away. And the ex-leper looks into his cup and says: *"A half a denarius! Look at this - he only gives me a half a denarius!"* And Brian says: *"Some people are never satisfied."* To which the leper replies: *"That's just what Jesus said!"*

Now Monty Python might be on to something. **Jesus** may not have said exactly these words but he certainly ran into people who were unappreciative with his TEACHINGS, WITH HIS WAYS OF LIFE.

Blind Bartimaeus was not one of them. **Upon receiving his sight, he not only told others about Jesus, but also allowed Jesus' Ways to be his Ways by Following Him.**

Do you believe Jesus is who he says he is?

If so, does his influence show in HOW YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE...or does your life more accurately reflect simply the community in which you live and the people with which you associate? He spoke with authority.

And this brings us to a final question: If Jesus is who he says he is, SHOULDN'T WE TELL OTHERS THE GOOD NEWS?

A young boy from a non-Christian family, whose name was Palmer was placed in a mission school by his Nigerian parents because they knew he would receive a good education there. He attended the school for years, yet he did not convert to Christianity. **He remained FAITHFUL TO HIS traditional African religion.**

One year a new missionary came to the school who began to develop close relationships with the students, including Palmer. Eventually the missionary led this young Nigerian to Christ. Palmer explained the missionary's influence like this: *"He built a bridge of friendship to me, and Jesus walked across."*

That is the best definition of evangelism that I have ever heard. **"He built a bridge of friendship to me, and Jesus walked across."**

That's what you and I should be doing each day of our lives: BUILDING "BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP" TO PEOPLE AROUND US SO THAT JESUS MAY WALK ACROSS.

JESUS SPOKE WITH AUTHORITY. There has never been another like him. He is the Son of God. That ought to make a difference in how we live our lives. We ought to be telling others about him. *We ought to be building Bridges to others so that Christ may walk across.*

AMEN.