

christ's word of authority and power

Luke 4:31-44; Epiphany 4C; February 1-2, 2025

**[Jesus] was teaching...and they were astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! 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 when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.**

**And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this Word? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" And reports (literally, "echoes" ἠχος) about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.**

Jesus had become a famous rabbi, Jewish teacher. People were **astonished** at Him because **His word possessed authority**. What distinguished Jesus from the typical rabbi of His day? It was generally acknowledged that the rabbis in Jesus' day were limited to explaining what Moses and the prophets had spoken from God, but did not bring anything new from God.

Jesus' preaching was like the prophets of old. Jesus not only explained and expounded on God's Word but spoke with God's authority and power. His Word performed miracles. Jesus silenced, rebuked and cast out demons. Jesus healed the sick. His Word created things, such as turning water into wine. Jesus' Word restored things to the way God wanted them. People recognized Jesus' Word as having the authority of God in it, which He backed up with powerful miracles. The Good News Jesus proclaimed had God's authority and power.

Today's Gospel Reading is about the authority and power of God's Word in Christ Jesus, the authority and power it had when spoken then and there, but also here and now.

We might be tempted to doubt that God's Word in Christ spoken here and now is full of authority and power.

One reason is that we don't see obvious results like when Jesus spoke and acted. I'm preaching God's Word right now, and when I'm finished, what will have changed in this world? We will pray for a lot of sick, injured, and dying people just we have done week after week, month after month, year after year. Peter's mother-in-law was healed in an instant, but not my mother-in-law or so many others who are sick and injured. People are still tormented by demons, but I haven't seen any driven out. It is easy to get discouraged when we keep praying for what God promises us, and we don't see the results.

Should us not being able to see the same results now cause us to doubt that God's Word in Christ is still working with authority and power? No. This is a matter of faith, as St. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians five: **we walk by faith, not by sight** (5:7). The writer to the Hebrews says basically the same thing: **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** God's Word cautions us not to pit sight against faith. What we are able to see with our eyes in this world is not the sum total of what God is doing.

The signs and wonders done by Jesus and His disciples, both during His visible earthly ministry as well as after His ascension into heaven, served the purpose of establishing that Jesus is the Christ. But, ultimately, the only sign that matters is Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection which will not be repeated but was done once for all. Christ crucified and risen from the dead is preached to the whole world. It seems so weak and foolish to unbelievers, but to those who have faith, those who believe in Jesus, it is Gospel, Good News, and the power of salvation.

This faith is worked in us by the Holy Spirit through the authoritative and powerful Word of Christ. This means that, if we are struggling to believe what we cannot see, we need to hear God's Word more, the Word which not only bring us to faith – **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ** (Ro. 10:17) – but the very Word that also strengthens and encourages us in our faith (Ac 15:32). Coming to church to hear God's Word is not a chore we have to do to keep God and pastors off our backs, but a wonderful gift and opportunity to grow in faith in God and love for our neighbors.

God's Word in Christ remains authoritative and powerful. With the "eyes" of faith we trust that God's Word does what it says. So, what do we believe this Word does, even when we can't see the results with our eyes?

During the Epiphany season we hear about Baptism, Jesus' and others'. God's Word combined with water in Holy Baptism is authoritative and powerful. Jesus commanded Baptism **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**. By that authority, when we are baptized into Christ, God does for us what He did at Jesus' baptism. God declares us to be His beloved children by putting His name on us. Our sins are taken from us and put on Jesus, who suffered, died, and rose to forgive us. We are given the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus as our Savior. We are promised that we are buried with Christ through baptism into His death and that we will be raised with Him to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

The rite of Holy Baptism includes the renouncing of the devil, all his works, and all his ways. By the authority and power of God's Word in Christ, the devil and all evil spirits are rebuked and cast out of the baptized. This is not the pastor's doing, but God at work. Luther's hymn, A Mighty Fortress, reminds us of this. *"The world's prince (the devil) may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him"* (656.3), chop him down to size. The devil cannot condemn us because God's Word has pronounced us without sin in the Absolution.

The authoritative and powerful Word God spoke at creation continues to do wonderful things today. A man and woman being joined in marriage still happens according to God's plan and purpose. Even in this fallen creation, by God's Word the two become one flesh, new families are created, and the procreation of children comes at the blessing and promise of God.

We don't see water turned into wine at a wedding today, but at the command and Word of Christ bread and wine become Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. God does a miracle so we can eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ, given and shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation.

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

Does God still heal the sick? Our own illnesses and injuries remind us of our eventual deaths. Our faith is that Jesus has died and risen with a glorious body, and those who have died with Christ will be raised with Christ to live forever. And that life will be the first true living any of us will have ever done: free forever from sin, sickness, and death; no sorrow or pain or suffering of any sort. Until then, God also works using natural knowledge and those gifted in the healing arts.

God's Word in Christ still has authority and power. If our faith begins to waver and we think we can only trust what our eyes see and not what our ears hear, the writer to the Hebrews encourages us: **“Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”** (12:2).

This season of the Church Year we are in, the Sundays after the Epiphany, also focuses us on the mission of the Church. The star led the Gentile wise men to worship the Christchild; God's Savior is for everyone. Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and doing miracles was about calling people to faith and follow Him as disciples. When people become Christians because of what God has done, they want this Good News to spread everywhere.

Luke described this in our Reading as the Gospel of Jesus “echoing” out. **And reports (“echoes” ἠχος) about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.** An echo is a sound that is reflected off of something and bounces back to be heard again.

When I stand at the main entrance of the church after funerals as the bodily remains of faithful Christians are being carried out to be taken to the cemetery, the church bell is tolled. I can hear each toll of the bell and shortly afterwards its echo, I guess from the church storage shed.

Reports about Jesus “echoed” all over the place. This is what God wants to happen with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What we have heard and seen Jesus do for us and others, needs to be spread to those around us and out into the whole world. May the Good News of Jesus we have heard echo off of us to everyone everywhere! Amen.