

²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and 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.' ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' ²⁶And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

From the beginning of this passage, we are told that Jesus is teaching with something different from the normal scribal teaching on this holy time in this holy place: something called **authority**, something called **power**.

There was a powerful threat to the people in Jewish rabbinic law – it was **becoming unclean or tainted, which meant being separated from God**.

Curiously **for the Jews**, it was *human action* taken in violation of the code, even coming into contact with the evil spirits *that would separate them from God*.

For **many western Christians** (unlike the Jews) they believe they are **born into this separation from God**, (the stain of original sin) and all life is a search for the “cure” to be returned to God.) **(Note that stain of original sin is NOT the teaching of Judaism nor of many Christians, particularly those of the Orthodox Christian Church.)**

The scribal teaching for all of these tainting/separation issues was singular and clear: **Steer Clear!** [*a la* the priest, the scribe, and the Levite in Jesus' parable of The Good Samaritan.] Teaching of Jesus, as in the Good Samaritan parable, one of his counter cultural teachings, that He repeated with frequency.

The unclean spirit in today's Gospel lesson also knew of this Jewish teaching and took advantage of it. He also sensed that there was something different about Jesus. The unclean spirit was trying to thrust and parry with this unknown opponent.

Then the unclean spirit finally nailed the argument: ***Aha! You are the Holy One of God. I know that YOU can't come into contact with me.***

Wrong-O, unclean spirit! Jesus says: ***Shut up!***

Jesus, you see has a different theology than that of the boundary creating scribes and of the unclean spirits taking advantage of that teaching. Jesus did not, and does not, respect their boundaries. He trespassed, and still trespasses, them. ***Shut up! That way of thinking is OVER!*** He ordered the unclean spirit out. And out it came, but not whimpering, the victim of a lost theological debate. It came out convulsing and crying in a loud voice. It has **not been out-argued**; it **has been overcome**. By a new teaching – one with power and authority.

Can you imagine how that evil spirit was surprised? That demon thought – because of the boundaries created by the Jewish teaching – that no one would cross over to encounter – certainly not the holy one! That demon was even more shocked than the Pharisees and the scribes, when Jesus yelled **SHUT UP** and **came in and kicked his sorry carcass out of the sick man.**

- That demon was like the defending **Super Bowl champion Green Bay Packer fans** when the **New York Giants** came onto Lambeau Field and spanked them.
- That demon was like the **Texas Ranger fans** when they were **one strike away from winning the World Series TWICE** and they still ended up losing to the **St. Louis Cardinals**.
- That demon was like **Osama bin Laden in the dead of night** when **the Navy Seals** came to make a visit. (And I thank Rod Blackstone for the help in these illustrative examples.)

The logic of arguments may or may not be bought.

But the power of authority can only be witnessed. And believed.

Like the centurion who encountered Jesus said in Matthew 8:9, ***“For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.”***

The **POWER** and **AUTHORITY** were **not just in the HEALING** – but perhaps even more so in the **BOUNDARY CROSSING**.

In the Arthurian legend, Merlin the wizard takes the boy Arthur (who would later become king) up into air to see all that could be seen from the vision of a hawk soaring above. He keeps asking Arthur what he sees. The answers of **“rivers and trees, ... cattle and sheep, ... villages and ...”** are all answered **“No!”** by Merlin, who tells Arthur that someday he will know what he saw.

It was not until the dream of Camelot had died that old Arthur realizes the truth of that day as a boy, up in the air with the vision of a hawk. It was **what he did NOT see that was what Merlin wanted him to know**. There were **NO BOUNDARIES**. Those are human made, not part of the unity of creation.

We humans can arrange divisions or meetings. That choice is up to us of what we do with the unity of God’s creation.

Sometimes the creation of boundaries is a loving thing to do.

- Most of the **preachers** I know who have gotten into trouble did not have a good sense of boundaries and crossed over them in realms of impropriety.
- **Teachers** who cross boundary lines can get in trouble, fired, or put in jail.

- For the sake of society, **stock brokers (or their television celebrity friends, regardless of how artsy crafty they are)** who cross certain boundary lines can get in trouble, fired, or put in jail.
- For the sake of safety and peace, **government officials, doctors, insurance agents, all citizens in a lawful society** who cross certain boundary lines can get in trouble, fired, or put in jail

But some boundaries are not at all loving. They are based on SELF preservation, not the respecting of others.

Jesus was constantly breaking down those boundaries. Saint Paul tried to summarize it when he wrote to the church in Galatia: **“There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”** (Galatians 3:28)

When to divide and **when to meet** was the issue addressed by Robert Frost in his famous poem **“Mending Wall.”** When Frost and his neighbor met to mend the wall that had stood between their properties, it is the *neighbor who said: “Good fences make good neighbors.”* That is the line oft quoted from the poem. But Frost goes on to argue in his own mind the issue:

Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I build a wall I'd ask to know
 What I am **walling in** or **walling out**,
 And to whom I was like to **give offense**.

We have all made and crossed boundaries in our daily living and in our life's story. When **DO** we? When **SHOULD** we?

Jesus, as we will see even more so in next week's Gospel teaching, **used PRAYER** – his connection with God to make sure that the actions he took were ones that were connected to God's power and God's authority.

When we simply follow the teachings of those before us, simply following like cattle or like sheep, we lack power, we lack authority. It is when our actions of making dividers or of making meeting, embracing places are guided by God's direction that they are undergirded by God's power and authority.

Part of the Membership Vows that Jeanette, Tracy, and John made today is that they will support the BODY OF CHRIST with their PRAYERS.

PRAYING – STAYING IN TOUCH WITH GOD IN REGULAR AND CONSTANT COMMUNION OF SPIRIT is how we make those important decisions.

I had a visitor in worship a couple of Sundays ago, ask me here in the sanctuary – right after that sermon about young Samuel hearing the call of God – HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S GOD TALKING TO YOU, OR JUST SELF TALK?

I looked at her, and looked at her husband, and said, "Do you think Charles has any problem knowing when he hears YOUR voice?" Over the years he knows how you sound. Even if he's just reading your words on paper, he can tell if that's you writing or another for you.

Last Sunday, my email account got hacked, and while I was preaching, phony emails went out to everyone in my contacts list. Some people said they knew it wasn't me, because they looked at the time stamp, and realized I was preaching at that time. Others told me they could tell by how it was worded that this was not something I had sent.

Jesus said **MY SHEEP WILL KNOW MY VOICE**.

It takes **PRACTICE**. It takes **REPETITION**. It takes **MORE THAN TALKING**; it also **requires LISTENING**.

- PRAYING keeps us in line.
- PRAYING shows us which boundaries are good and which are not.

- PRAYING is what gives us POWER and AUTHORITY, even as it did Jesus.
- PRAYER – it's NOT JUST a membership vow OF DUTY. It's also a GIFT that enables us to live life abundantly and powerfully and eternally.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.