

### 3<sup>rd</sup> in Epiphany Series “Getting into Shape in the New Year”

Trust the Trainer **Mark 1:21-28**

St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 4th Sunday after Epiphany (February 1, 2015)

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them **as one who had authority**, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> “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.” <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Today is Super Bowl Sunday. I am reveling in the election announced on the eve of Super Bowl 49 of the new inductees into the Hall of Fame of the man who rushed for the 6<sup>th</sup> best yards total of any running back in history – Jerome Bettis, aka THE BUS, of the Pittsburgh Steelers, on his fifth year of eligibility, and his fifth year of nomination. Well done, Bus, whose last year was in winning Super Bowl 40. Even his nemesis, of the Baltimore Ravens, Ray Lewis said recently “If Jerome Bettis is not inducted into the Hall of Fame, then I don’t understand what the Hall of Fame is all about.”

I confess that I am particularly happy about this – not just because of my affinity with the Steelers – but also because Jerome Bettis was a role model for my daughter. Jerome Bettis, like my daughter, suffered from the disease of ASTHMA, and my daughter’s doctor at WVU Med Center told her that if Jerome Bettis could play in the NFL, then she too should not feel like her life was limited. She went on to row Crew, and to play Rugby, because she was told that Jerome Bettis could be a world class athlete, while suffering from Asthma, so she could do what she chose & worked for.

Role models are very important for all of us.

On this day of Super Bowl 49, I am also thinking about Lyle Alzado (April 3, 1949 – May 14, 1992) who was a defensive end of the National Football League, famous for his intense and intimidating style of play. He played 15 seasons, for the Denver Broncos, the Cleveland Browns, and finally the Los Angeles Raiders, with whom he won a championship in Super Bowl XVIII.

Indeed, the man whom [ESPN](#) would later find a "violent, combative player known for his short temper" inspired the league rule against throwing a helmet after having done so himself to an opponent's helmet

Alzado was one of the first major US sports figures to admit to using [anabolic steroids](#). In the last years of his life, as he battled against the [brain tumor](#) that eventually caused his death, Alzado asserted that his steroid abuse directly led to his fatal illness. Alzado recounted his steroid abuse in an article in [Sports Illustrated](#),

I started taking anabolic steroids in 1969 and never stopped. It was addicting, mentally addicting. Now I'm sick, and I'm scared. Ninety percent of the athletes I know are on the stuff. We're not born to be 300 lb (140 kg) or jump 30 ft (9.1 m). But all the time I was taking steroids, I knew they were making me play better. I became very violent on the field and off it. I did things only crazy people do. Once a guy sideswiped my car and I beat the hell out of him. Now look at me. My hair's gone, I wobble when I walk and have to hold on to someone for support, and I have trouble remembering things. My last wish? That no one else ever dies this way.

Alzado died at age 43.

Alzado was, and is, an example of a person who went over to the "dark side" in order to excel in his sport. He went the way of the anabolic steroid as a quick fix, a shortcut way to improve his athletic prowess--a way that has since been condemned by the NFL, and later, by MLB, as an inappropriate way to excel. The careers of Barry Bonds, Roger Clemons, Mark McQuire, , Sammy Sosa. Alex Rodriguez, and Manny Ramirez were all tainted by the association with anabolic steroids.

Why?

Because someone told them it was a shortcut to excellence.

This is NOT the program to which TRAINER JESUS recruits people.

He recruits people by a DIFFERENT AUTHORITY ... something that doesn't seem to make sense.

When I was in my first day of law school orientation, the dean of that law school said that there were two types of students before him: (1) those who want to **do well** and (2) those who wanted to **do good**. He said that there would be precious few of us who would figure out how to do both.

Later, in that first year, my constitutional law professor told us, as he eulogized -- in our class -- a powerful Wall Street lawyer friend, who died the day before, **“This lawyer had a basic rule for the practice of law: if you always do the most ethical thing, it will somehow, even if you don’t know how in the moment turn out to be the most strategic thing you can do.”**

These bits of advice turned out to be things by which my life was guided.

There are some things in life that seem “counterintuitive” that nonetheless will give us guidance. Things that will stick with us, and which will shape how we live.

It’s one thing to HEAR them spoken.

It’s ANOTHER thing to SEE them lived.

And it’s A WHOLLY DIFFERENT THING to be in a trusting RELATIONSHIP with the one who speaks and does them.

This is how it was for those who followed a Teacher from a northern backwater province of Galilee who did things that caught their imagination and who spoke to them “with an authority which they had not heard before.”

The question for us today – and it is a very real question – does Jesus still speak to us with a VOICE OF AUTHORITY?

There is one brand of religion, some even (I would say, erroneously) call it Christianity, which is based on “following the rules.” Do this and get the goodies. Don’t do it our way and you will suffer the consequences.

Then there is the example that we see from today’s scripture: entering into the relationship with Jesus where His Authority is known.

When you are in that kind of relationship, it’s based on TRUST.

You are willing to do things that don’t seem sensible – at least as the world teaches you. Things like:

- YOU are not number 1.
- The Kingdom of Heaven IS AT HAND. You can live IN IT RIGHT NOW and experience the INCREDIBLE POWER that Jesus demonstrated. (Remember that He said we will do even greater things than He did.)
- If you put anything before God – ANYTHING – then you don’t worship God.
- You don’t have to be in charge.

- You can move forward, without knowing the outcome, without controlling the outcome, so long as you hold Jesus' hand, and you know that you will be alright.
- When it seems like there is no way out of your present situation, God is right there beside you and your Brother Jesus, and you will be alright.

As we go through life, there will be times when we are on the mountain top. There will be times when we are in the valley of deepest, darkest shadows. WHO WE TRUST and TO WHOME WE GIVE AUTHORITY will make all the difference.

If we look for Him only in the valleys, it's hard to find him in the darkness. Although that is sometimes where people are first willing to put down all the trinkets of reliance that have failed them, and begin the search.

How much the better if – as Jesus said elsewhere – we are like the sheep who know the shepherd's voice, and can hear him call us in the midst of the darkness.

Jesus question for us today – as we strive to get into shape: TO WHAT DO YOU GIVE AUTHORITY IN YOUR LIFE?

Almost anyone can have a very good clue to that by looking into someone's:

- Calendar and
- Checkbook

I won't do that ... except to look at my own.

But you can do so ... if you are willing.

Who has authority in your life?

- Do you want a steroid approach to success?
- Do you want to be a workout buddy with Jesus?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?