

What is it with authority? What comes to mind when you think of authority? I have this wild mix of images that don't really match, ranging from my ordination vows where I vowed to remain under the authority of my bishop, bumper stickers encouraging me to question it, and Eric Cartman driving around South Park on his tricked out police big wheel kneecapping motorists for not "respecting his authoritah!"

If you look at the reading from Deuteronomy and the gospel today, I think they are bound by the underlying question of authority, not only in the writers, but also the hearers. Take Deuteronomy, for instance. The people of Israel are getting their final marching orders prior to entering the promised land. Finally. After years of waiting, wandering, hoping that they would see the day as so many around them never made it. Being reminded of how to live in covenant with God, how to be God's people, they are promised a prophet. Someone like Moses, someone to stand in for them and speak directly to God, someone to spare them the terror of seeing God's presence or hearing God's voice. They wanted, no needed someone to speak on God's authority, keeping them connected to God's word. I don't know about you, but I envision them ready to jump in with "not it!" as soon as the call was sent.

In the gospel today we are still in the early stages of Jesus' ministry. Typical of Mark, he wastes no time getting to the point. You'll note that in his gospel, Mark denies us the warm and fuzzy nativity narrative opting instead to start with John baptizing Jesus. From there, Jesus is tempted, and then rolls up his sleeves and gets to work. Sixteen verses into the first chapter, Jesus is calling his disciples. Today, merely twenty-one verses in, Jesus lays down the gauntlet. Even the unclean spirits know what he is about, often well before Jesus' own followers.

From the word Go, Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God. Here it is, he says. His works, his teaching, it is all about the Kingdom. Healing, feeding the multitude, you name it, it is about one thing and one thing only. God's kingdom. Jesus isn't preaching nice sermons about what the prophets said, or reminding them how to follow purity codes, this much is known. He isn't only talking about the kingdom, he is showing them the kingdom. That is what the people are noticing. It's not that Jesus is a charismatic preacher with a stunning set of pearly whites telling them everything they want to hear. His authority speaks to something more. His authority isn't an act, or an attitude, or a conviction; the very weight of the world hangs in the balance under his authority.

There is that word again. Authority. Before you baby boomers think that you and Timothy Leary have the market cornered on questioning it, I feel as though I should inform you Socrates is more accurately credited in getting that ball rolling, but that's neither here nor there. Anyway, whether we are questioning it or deferring to it, authority is something we face in our day to day life. The question that matters, I think, is whose authority will we subject ourselves to? It's not easy is it? And it's not for lack of options either. In my experience, submitting to an authority is more often than not a bitter pill to swallow, even when we know it is the right thing to do.

NT Wright states it quite plainly in his commentary on today's readings. He reminds us that "the Kingdom of God is not a democracy." Try that on for size. And he continues, "God's redemptive word of authority, calling us to order, breaks through the noise of humans stampeding in the wrong direction. Admitting this means swallowing pride. Refusing to recognize it means conniving at self-destruction. Lemmings all go together when they go."

Jesus' authority compelled four fisherman out of their daily routine. It drew a tax collector away from a lucrative, albeit dishonest career. Jesus' authority over heaven and earth fed the multitude, calmed a raging sea, healed the sick, drove out demons, and raised the dead, for starters. By Jesus' word our broken relationship with God is given new life, beyond our limited perspective and selfish desires, our very eyes opened to a new way of life in the light of God's grace.

What is Jesus doing today that amazes us? What is he accomplishing in our midst? Look around, His kingdom is breaking through, when we let him.