

Epiphany 4 2/1/15
Mark 1:21-28 B

AND THEY WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS TEACHING, FOR HE TAUGHT THEM AS ONE WHO HAD AUTHORITY.

We've all heard it so many times we can all say it together, "That's your opinion." You've heard those words, right? Big game today. Some of us would contend it would be a much better game if another team were playing, and we hear, "That's your opinion." Some think that Asics are the best running shoes, others prefer another brand, some consider running to be a complete waste of one's efforts, so we hear, "That's your opinion." Some think that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; that no one comes to God the Father through Him," and we hear "That's just your opinion."

To be certain, as we have discussed in our 1 Corinthians Bible class, we live under the banner of Christian freedom, so let me be clear that when it comes to such things as sports, or running shoes, we are free to disagree. But, when it comes to knowing God and having everlasting life in heaven, we are not free to believe our own opinion or have our own idea. Only Jesus is the name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

But, that is a message people do not always welcome. In his Gospel, John tells us, "[Jesus] came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him (1:11)." He comes, and Herod, seeing a threat to his reign and power, kills all the little boys in Bethlehem and in that region under the age of two. He comes, and proclaims, "before Abraham was, I am -- *{that is}* I am God," and they picked up stones to kill Him. He comes, and says, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven," and the ruling authorities condemn Him to death for

speaking blasphemy. That's the world's way of saying to Jesus, "That's your opinion."

"A disciple is not above His master," Jesus teaches us. I point that out to you because we don't seem to fare much better than Jesus. Things really haven't changed a whole lot. Take the topic of the day -- abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, creation, evolution, how to get into heaven. It doesn't really matter much what it is, it seems everyone is entitled to their own opinion and all opinions are the same. No one dares to assert that there is only one truth because we live in a time which believes that there is no absolute truth and all truth is relative. In other words, what is true for me may not be true for you. And vice versa, your truth may not be my truth. But, that's ok, the world says, because we are all entitled to our opinion. And if someone dares stand up and make a definite, authoritative statement, they are liable to be told, "That's your opinion. I feel differently. I have a different reality. I hold to a different truth, and you need to be tolerant of that; you need to respect that.

That's the world in which we live. The end result is that there are a lot of opinions, a lot of ideas, a lot of realities. And, the bottom line is that there is no truth; there is no right and no wrong. There's just your opinion.

You may remember Rev. Daniel Preus from when he was our mission speaker several years ago. Rev. Preus was the essayist at the recent district convention. He explained it this way: Let's say you and many others are in a room. And there are four doors leading into and out of this room. But, you know that three of those doors are locked. Only one of them is open. Terrorists come in and drop some type of poisonous gas that will kill everyone in that room. Everyone has the opinion that every door is equal. Everyone has the opinion that every door will save them.

That is their opinion. Is it true? Just because it is their opinion, does it make it true?

Jesus doesn't play the game that everyone is entitled to their opinion and all opinions are true. Into a world which says that there is no absolute truth, Jesus comes and preaches and teaches as one who has authority. He comes and says what He means and means what He says. And what He says is this, "Repent and believe the Gospel." Repent, an authoritative teaching based on the absolute truth that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that the wages of sin is death -- spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death in hell. You can't argue with Jesus about that. You can't debate Jesus about that because your own life -- with all your failures, all your shortcomings, all your griefs and disappointments, all your sin bears witness to the truth that what Jesus says is true.

Believe in the Gospel. Another authoritative, definite statement based on the truth that the only escape from sin and death is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel that says "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk 8:31). You can't debate Jesus on that. You can't argue with Him about that because not only did Jesus teach that authoritatively, He lived it and He died it.

When He reaches Jerusalem, it all happened just as He predicted it would. He suffered many things -- rejection, abandonment by His friends, and, ultimately, abandonment by His own Father. As He said would happen, the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes did accuse Him of blasphemy and condemn Him to death. From there, off He went to Pontius Pilate, who tried and convicted Him of being a threat to the Roman empire. He suffered, He was mocked, He was scorned, He was ridiculed, spit upon,

crowned with thorns, paraded through the streets, taken to Calvary, and there nailed to a wooden cross. In His last dying breath, what did He do? He taught as one who had authority, saying, "It is finished."

As it went with that demon who was finished, so it goes with you, because Christ died upon that cross teaching the authoritative Word of God that proclaims to you that your sin is done, your death is done, your hell is done, your demons are done. And on the 3rd day, He rose again from the dead to bring you the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation by the means of Word and Sacraments.

Guess what else He came to do? Teach us as one who had authority. So when Jesus comes to you and says, "Peace be with you," peace is really with you. It is the peace of sins forgiven, and you can't argue it or debate it, because it is sealed in the bloody death and resurrection of Jesus for you. When Jesus comes and says to you, "Never will I leave you forsake you. I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. I love you. I forgive you. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No matter what the words are that flow from His lips, it comes with the absolute authority of God, so that you cannot debate; you cannot argue with it. You can only be sure and certain that you are loved, that you are cared for, that you are never alone, that your worries and your cares can be thrown upon Him, for He genuinely cares for you. All that is yours because Jesus teaches as one who has authority, because that is exactly what He has -- the absolute authority of God which He brings to bear upon you, for your forgiveness, your comfort, your hope. In Jesus' Name. Amen.