

Epiphany #4

1-31-2021

J.V. Trautwein

Vicar Karen Pugatch

Celebrate (Introduction)

“In Deuteronomy God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, who will speak for God; in Psalm 111 God shows the people the power of God’s works. For the church these are ways of pointing to the unique authority people sensed in Jesus’ actions and words. We encounter that authority in God’s word, around which we gather, the word that prevails over any lesser spirit that would claim power over us, free in us to follow Jesus.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“We Come to You for Healing Lord”](#)

Psalm: 111

“Praise the Lord!

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

²Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who have pleasure in them.

³Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and merciful.

⁵He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.

⁶He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.

⁷The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy,

⁸they are established for ever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

⁹He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and terrible is his name!

¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
a good understanding have all those who practice it.
His praise endures forever!”

Hymn of Praise: [“We Praise You, O God!”](#)

Prayer of the Day

“Compassionate God, you gather the whole universe into your radiant presence and continually reveal your Son as our Savior. Bring wholeness to all that is broken and speak truth to us in our confusion, that all creation will see and know your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.”

1st Reading: [Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)

2nd Reading: [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#)

The Gospel: [Mark 1:21-28](#)

Hymn of the Day: [“Lord Jesus Think of Me”](#)

The Message: ([Video Link](#))

I often think of how much life has changed within my lifetime. I remember as a child there was no such thing as TV; entertainment was by radio which relied on one’s imagination to make the show come alive. There were no computers, no internet, no cell phones, and even no automatic anything in cars. It was a time when life was much simpler but requiring more hands-on work and less free time. But, that changed very rapidly. The advent of the computer and then the microchip major brought major rapid changes to our society. Interactive communication became instantaneous and almost universal. We are not only able to have conversations with someone on the opposite side of the world but the ability for the average person to actually see that person. Much of our daily information and news is at the click of a computer mouse. To many the internet has become the authority in life which of course can be very destructive for anyone can post anything and be a self-proclaimed authority. This has become very evident and even dangerous to social order.

All of this wasn’t even dreamed but perhaps wildly fantasized about when I was a child. The changes have come so quickly that we have found it to be difficult to affectively and fairly assimilate all of this into an ordered society. Too many who only know this new world of cyberspace it may be difficult to understand the nature and importance of the role of institutions which have come through the ages. These institutions may be thought to have become obsolete in light of the high speed and instantaneous websites, forums, chat rooms, zoom, and tweets. But institutions still play a role in society even though these historic institutions may have changed and face even more changes. One of these institutions is mentioned in our Gospel lesson this morning, the synagogue. Today we understand the synagogue to be the worship and educational center of Judaism much as the church is to Christianity. It has its Rabbis and Cantors who lead worship, teach and preach much like Christian ministers.

But in Jesus day the synagogue's role in that society was somewhat different than today. Strictly speaking it was not the place for worship. It was not the place for singing or conducting the rituals and sacrifices of Judaism. This was the function of the temple in Jerusalem and left to the temple priests. The synagogues were located wherever at least ten Jewish families lived. The synagogue was an educational institution for children and for prayer, the reading of the scripture and the exposition of the scriptures. There was no professional minister to do this. The ruler of the synagogue would be chosen from the attendees to speak or give the exposition of the scriptures. In some ways the closest example would be an orthodox Quaker meeting in which pretty much anybody could contribute.

For Jesus, in just beginning his ministry, the synagogue was a natural place for him to speak for it was a ready-made audience. He was a fresh face and his teaching would have been filled with a message which was old yet new. The people's reaction to Jesus is indicated by Mark, "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Now this was strange for the Scribes were considered to be the authority of the Torah, the books of the law. They were the ones to judge the practices of life over-against the law. They were the ones whose interpretations of the law were handed down from generation to generation as oral tradition. When they made a pronouncement they cited the letter of the law in order to justify and give authority to their judgment. They could not insert their own opinion without citing what had been handed down as canon interpretation. They always would begin a pronouncement by saying; "There is a teaching that...." And then he would quote all of his authorities.

The people were so accustomed to the traditions and practices of the Scribes that they knew nothing much new would come from them for they had no authority to speak on their own. So when Jesus spoke he was not bound by tradition, he spoke with an authority beyond the Torah and beyond the oral Scribal traditions. Jesus like the prophets of old did not have to recite letter and verse for everything He said. His authority was beyond that. Jesus spoke before the people with total independence. There was no wavering in what he said but spoke with the finality and assurance of the voice of God in their midst. Jesus message as we see throughout the Gospels was positive and filled with promise, conviction, and certainty. The people saw this and experienced this man who had authority beyond what they had ever experienced.

So Jesus began his ministry taking advantage of an established institution as the best means to quickly assert not only His message but also His authority. He made the best out of what was available to him. One wonders if somehow if He would walk the face of the earth today if He would somehow use the internet in order to begin to proclaim His message or if the problems of this modern institution is fraught with too many potential problems. But His authority would reach well beyond what the internet, as we know it, is capable of doing for he had that one-on-one physical connection with the man who was possessed by a demon or unclean spirit. How this was manifested in the man we do not know for in that day demons and unclean spirits were believed to be the cause of both physical and mental disorders. Mark tells us that a man with an unclean spirit cried out to Jesus while still in the synagogue: "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.”

Although the people gathered in the synagogue that Sabbath perhaps were thinking the same thing, but it was this possessed man who proclaimed it and who would be the one to help the others understand the real authority which Jesus had. Jesus then rebuked him, “Be silent, and come out of him!” Then we are told the “...unclean spirit .convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.” This Jesus not only spoke with convincing authority but also had the authority over the demons and unclean spirits. “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” This sealed the deal for the people. Jesus had an authority which they had not experienced before.

It is interesting that those in the synagogue that Sabbath were so taken by what they understood as a God given authority to speak and to act that they didn’t question His healing practice on a Sabbath. Healing was considered by the Scribal law to be unlawful on the Sabbath and Jesus would be cited for breaking this law several times in His ministry. But here in this synagogue on this particular Sabbath He was not confronted. This is an early indication that the people saw that Jesus’ authority was beyond the law and that His message and life was a fulfillment of God’s promise of a new covenant with His people. He was the “Holy One of God”, the Messiah. It was in Jesus that they saw the authority of God.

This authority of God’s message of the Good News would not be sealed until the cross and then the Resurrection but the recognition of it began very early and it seems a reality among whoever he may have touched through spoken word or acts. It is this authority which lives on today through not only the scriptures but through His presence as He is made known through all who profess being His followers – all those who are in the Body of Christ. Yes, we all have the authority of God within us ready to be seen and experienced by others. This authority only becomes alive, real, meaningful, and fulfilled when it is actually made known. We can choose to lock it up within ourselves or we can make it known through how we live, speak, and act. To lock it up is to deny the reality of God’s love within us for love needs to be shared in order to be fulfilled. It is this authority to live God’s love which is our responsibility as His followers to live and to make known. In order to do this we must creatively utilize all those avenues available to us, even with the oldest and most effective means - that is, by how we chose to live this authority given to us. Times may change and will do so. Institutions may change and will do so, Means of communication and technology may change and most certainly will do so. Authorities may come and go and will do so. But the authority found in God’s revelation through Jesus Christ will continue and God’s authority will continue to be revealed to mankind no matter the changes brought about by mankind. That is the eternal authority of God of which we share. This is what gives us hope during times of uncertainty, crises, and change..

Anthem: [“There is a Balm in Gilead”](#) The Adventist Vocal Ensemble

Offering*: ([On-Line Giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

The Prayer

All loving God, we are a people who need to pause and reflect who we are in light of your love. Help us to get beyond our ego-centered agendas so that we may begin to see the human worth in each other. Open our eyes so that we may see the damage we are doing to each other when we could be helping each other. Instead of threats give us the will to speak of reconciliation. Clear our minds so we begin to determine truth beyond what we wish it to be. Give us the wisdom to act in unity and peace during these troubled time

We remain in the clutches of the pandemic and still need the patience to follow the guidelines which save lives. During this time give strength to those who are caring for the sick and dying. May we find ways to more effectively distribute the vaccine which we so desperately need. So many are suffering from the lack of economic means, may we let our love pour forth in order to help them.

We pray for all whole need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Elshafei family, Betty Fultz, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Donna Mayhew, Bev and Jim Mertz, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, David Otto, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Linda Rigby, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family, Linda Stephens, Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Linda Williamson, Pastor Jack, and all those who are suffering pain, and sorrow as a result of this pandemic.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you;

The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters

Live on knowing God's love,

The joy of living this life of love,

And the peace which only comes through the power of His presence within you.

So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: ["All Hail the Power of Jesus Name"](#)

We are discontinuing in person worship services on Sundays until further notice. The online worship experiences will continue as well as the Midweek Thought.

***Offering to be sent to:**

Bob Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Road
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church

9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043

<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291

Many thanks for those who took down the decorations yesterday; Pam, Julie, Connor, and Duncan Ash, Katie and Ed Hawkins III, and Ed Hawkins, Jr.