

Authority – Mark 1

Today we talk about authority. Authority is defined as: the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. So for example, I have authority over my children. I tell them to clean up, they have to go clean up. Unless they want a battle. And sometimes they do. Then my authority is brought into effect and it's up to me to discipline and follow through until they realize "maybe it would be easier if I just cleaned up?"

In George RR Martin's novels "A Song of Ice and Fire" there is a scene where a member of the royal court learns a secret about the queen and threatens her with it saying, "Knowledge is power." She scoffs and tells her guards to grab him, they do. She tells them to kill him, they draw their swords; she tells them to stop (she changed her mind), they stop; she tells them to step back three paces, to turn around, and to close their eyes, they do. Then she tells the court member: "Power is power." Then she stalks off with her guards in tow.

The court member thought he had authority, but he couldn't back it up. Like a parent unwilling to fight the battle with the two year old and caves to their demands. There is no authority if there is no power to keep it and enforce it.

This was problematic in much of the ancient world. Who was to stop the bands of thieves from ransacking your town? Better have a big wall and men willing to

fight. Or at least a ruler who was willing to track down the bands of thieves and put them to a miserable end for hurting his people. But what if your ruler didn't care or wasn't strong enough? That could lead to a tough life.

In medieval times in the feudal system you had knights. But knights were sinful men, of course, who didn't mind a drink or a dalliance now and then. So what did you do with these knights who were bred and trained to be killers? What was to stop them from taking the girl they wanted, or the food, or the land, or the wine? What was to stop them from using their titles and strength, their authority, to do whatever they wanted? No one was strong or connected enough to challenge them. How did the Prince keep them all in line? I mean just imagine a two year old who wants whatever they want and don't care about others, but then give them 100 pounds of muscle, armor, and a sword! It's a nightmare.

So the concept of Chivalry comes along. Chivalry is the ideology that, instead of using your strength and authority to get what you want like an overgrown two year old, you would use your authority and strength to protect and serve others. There's a reason that slogan is written on the side of our police cars. They have authority, strength, weaponry, lets pray they use it for the good of the people. So this concept of protection, honor, and service was told in story and song and celebrated at festivals and tournaments. Suddenly the best knights had more than strength, they

had virtue as well. This is a beautiful, and I hope to show, Biblical, concept, folks.

Yes, hang in there, this is still a sermon.

But the sad reality is chivalry, and the Biblical concept of strength and honor, is dying out. We've replaced it on one hand, with de-masculinity. So instead of telling the overgrown two year olds to grow up, we have stripped them of their armor and weapons, which leaves them weaker, yes, but unable to fight the battles that need be fought. As if the way to keep the peace was to get rid of the knights all together! Sure it solves your problem of what to do with their bad behavior, but it sure doesn't help you when the enemy army is at your gates.

And for those who reject de-masculinity we are left with the same unbridled machismo of the middle ages. If all that matters is sex, money, drink, and power, then it sure is nice to be a big strong man who doesn't have to think of anything more complex than the next one night stand, gym session, or new truck. And so on this hand we still have our overgrown two year olds, and we wonder why abuse and addiction are still among us.

And on either hand, men are left unsuitable for serious debate or thinking on things eternal or moral, and unwilling or unable to lead a family (let alone a Church) because of cowardice or just a lifetime of being told to sit down, be quiet, and watch TV shows.

It's a shame because God made strength and authority and wisdom and honor for a reason! Not to abuse, no, not to lord it over others, no, not to be toxic, no, but to protect and serve and lead.

We should probably clarify here in 2021 (as I am aware these concepts are counter-cultural) that these issues don't just apply to men. Because as much as society might think the Church thinks you women are only frail and helpless, as if we hold doors open for you ladies because you aren't strong enough to open them yourselves, are there areas where you use your tools and authority and position to serve yourself more than others? Far be it from us to say the strong women of the Bible didn't model wisdom and bravery, putting tent pegs through king's heads and Esther boldly walks into the Babylonian Emperor's throne room. Far be it from us to say the single mothers of today aren't brave. No, there is no need to debate such things. No, because real men are not threatened by strong women, they celebrate them.

What we need to start debating is the fact that men and women, and the difference between them, matter. The sociology bears this out. About 23 of 25 school shooters don't have a father in the home, no strong man to teach them, talk about real issues, or to model strength and honor. So the chivalry of a man holding a door for a woman does not mean she is incapable of opening it, it's a very small act of

service that hopefully models the idea that this man is here for her good, not to use her for his means and leave. That's what we need.

Paul says the same in our epistle lesson, you may have the right and authority and power to do something, but is it always the loving thing to do? He doesn't think so. So let's use our power, position, status, and knowledge to serve.

Because, again, this is not a sociology report, this is a sermon. In our Gospel lesson Jesus comes into that synagogue and he is a leader, a teacher with authority. He teaches things eternal, things meaningful and deep. So let's get past this idea that "men shouldn't talk about feelings, and stick to football." No, let's man up and speak on things of life and death and eternity.

So here is Jesus preaching on things of eternal consequence when he's interrupted in his teaching. This is something that would cause any of us, myself included, to stutter and blush. Could you imagine someone asking a question in the middle of the sermon in a Lutheran Church!? We wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. It's awkward just thinking about it.

But Jesus isn't stuttering or blushing. He has authority, he is a leader, you can't phase him. So he rebukes the demon, and like a two year old it throws a fit, but, alas, it cannot usurp the authority of the Holy One of God. So it obeys. Jesus is stronger.

The people are amazed, and rightly so. His fame spreads, and rightly so. Some would want him to be an earthly King, but no, that is not how Jesus will use his authority. He will use his authority, sure, to heal the sick, to calm the wind and waves, to raise the dead. Notice, those are all acts of service! Notice he never uses his power and might to help himself. This is a chivalrous man, no?

Even as he suffers, he will not save himself. Even as he suffers, he still has authority. So when Judas comes to betray him, it is Jesus, the one with authority who says, Matt 26:50, "Friend, do what you came here to do." It is Jesus who tells Peter to put his sword away and heals the ear it chopped off. It is Jesus who speaks not a word to "King" Herod who wanted to see him do a miracle – Jesus is no sideshow act. It is Jesus who speaks truth to Pontius Pilate. (Pilate who, in contrast to Jesus, will use his authority to save himself from a riot but get an innocent man killed – not exactly honorable.) And so the Holy One of God, in control the whole way, goes to his death, beaten, abused, and mocked by brutes with no thought of the eternal weight of what they were doing. They just laughed, gambled for a tunic, and went on with the brutal crucifixion.

Little did they know he was being crucified for all of our abuses, our shouting matches, for when it came to blows, for stepping on another to get ahead, for the snide remark to cut someone back, for failing in our callings, for cowardice, for it all. He died for it all when he didn't have to! Do you think he had the power and

authority to come down off the cross? To kill every last soldier who mocked him? To annihilate every last pharisee who used their power to get him killed? To pour vengeance on every last disciple who abandoned him? Oh he had the power, he had the might, he had the authority! But, instead he sets it aside that we might be forgiven and saved. Talk about service, talk about protection, forget chivalry, talk about love.

But we are talking about authority. And make no mistake, he still had it. So he rose again. And all mouths stop, all excuses go away, no one, no one, when they see the risen King dares doubt or challenge his authority. And he in his authority has said that you are forgiven. You, who believe in Him, you, baptized in His name, are his. And you have eternal life. Who wants to challenge his verdict? The cancer, the depression, the age - none of that usurps his authority. The demons can't say a word against him, do you think you can?

You know what we can do? Rejoice in his verdict. Let's rejoice in the power, glory, and authority of our Risen King. Because we know that he will not use it to abuse us, he will use it to save us. He already has, we have no reason to doubt him or call him a liar. So rejoice. Wall Street and big tech and the powers of the world will do what they can to help themselves with their authority, but we need not fear. Because we are a part of a Kingdom where the King will not let the thieves go unpunished, and he will see his people to a place of goodness and peace. May we

as citizens in that kingdom then, rejoice in the callings and blessings he has given us, and use them to protect, to serve, to love one another, as a reflection of how he loved us. In the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.