

Rev. George Arceneaux

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

1.28.24

Friends, I gotta start by saying I got really really revved up to preach today. Like, more than usual. And its because today's Gospel gives us direction, its reminds that we listen to this Jesus guy for a reason. That we don't go to church just because our parents told us to (and I'm looking at you kids, cuz that may be a little close to home). We do this whole church and Christianity thing for a reason.

That reason what this Gospel is all about. The story of this guy who came out of nowhere and said he was on the side of God. He knew the scriptures and professed them, knew the traditions and did a lot of what the religious authorities and top dogs did at the time. But this Jesus guy had authority in a way that no other person did.

So what in the heck is that word authority all about? Why did Jesus have it while others didn't? Well, digging into yon biblical commentaries, which reside my office the authority that Jesus is all about in this passage, I think it basically comes down to the fact that when Jesus does stuff and when he talks about God, people listen, and people are helped. That's it.

I'm gonna ask a question and don't worry you don't need to answer out loud. How many times can you remember sitting in church listening to a sermon that just felt paint by numbers. How often have you sat with some dude going on about something that does not seem to have any particular relevance to your life, that it feels like the Pastor is just saying stuff that is just boring you to tears. And aren't you so grateful I've never done that to you. Good God I'm sorry if I've ever done that to you.

But have you seriously, ever thought why do I have to say this Nicene creed again, why the heck is the church or the community around me saying that God is perfect when there's so much hurt in the world, or where the heck was the church when I lost my job, or I came out to the world, or when my marriage fell apart, or whatever?

Well, yon, biblical commentaries from yon sacred pastor's-office-bookshelf-from-IKEA say those questions and those times where the church felt a gazillion miles away from you and what you were going through. That's what this Gospel is about. About the authority that is in Jesus which is real and meets you where you need. And how we can get caught thinking we've got authority that fails like that of the scribes and religious authorities of Jesus' time.

There's a difference between the authority of Jesus and the authority of those who spout off dogma and ritual tradition only because they are what has always been done. It's because that dry enforcement of the past that so many people were hurt, and that Jesus works were so miraculous. Because he showed that God is there for those who hated and outcast, who are poor, and sick and lonely.

Jesus' authority comes from knowing why the traditions of the past mattered, why they might need to be changed, and the fact that, at the end of the day God has never cared about tradition and law for its own sake, but instead for people.

The authority of Jesus matters because it helped everyday people. And it's the model which we in the church are called to live by today.

So this time I'm actually gonna ask a question and I want you to raise your hand respond. We're doing this wiggle worship style for kids if I have board you to pieces at this point wake up, I need your help adults you can get on this action too if you want I'm coming down from the pulpit I wish you raise your hand. I want you to let me know what's something that you think stresses people out. What something stressful?

We've got all this stuff that can distract us, or hurt us, or stress us out, or just keep us away from how good life can be.

The authority of the scribes and the Pharisees is one that fails to embrace both the struggles and the joys of being alive. But the authority of Jesus is one that meets us in our hurts and darkness, as well as our joys in the moment, and teaches us to discipline ourselves towards love.

The path of Christianity is not an easy one. And so often it can be so simplified as to just follow what the people in power say, or to follow what you were taught as a child without knowing why. Straight up, kids, 15 years from now if you remember anything I've said, hold it with a grain of salt and remember to keep figuring things out for yourself

But that's what we're here to deal with. To help each other and remember the authority of Christ that saw past that surface level stuff and into who people really are. And in seeing others tried to be beside them. Our Gospel's is a good message for today. I do not think of the church as Christ. I and this institution and this building do not have all the answers. But each of you, from youngest, to oldest has a bit of truth in you, and a bit of that authority from Christ. This year's annual meeting, I hope you stick around and help us give this place an authority that drives out demons and hatred and despair, and replaces all that with love. Amen.