

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

I want to talk about authority and power today, two words that figure prominently in our text: authority (ἐξουσία) and power (δύναμις) — two words that shine the Epiphany light on Jesus.

According to the lexicons, sometime these two words can refer to the same thing. And Luke may be using authority in our text in v. 32 in that way ... meaning power — the ESV translates it: *“for his word possessed authority”*; but you could translate it: *“for His word was with power.”* But in verse 36, as Luke uses both words in the same phrase — *“For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits,”* I think he is signaling a difference between these two words: authority and power.

I think the use of “authority” here is as one who has a commission, or even an office, to do the things he does. And Jesus was sent with a commission to save the world: *“For God did not send his Son into the world [with the commission] to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”* (John 3:17). Again, the resurrected Jesus said to His disciples: *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me [with a commission], even so I am sending you”* (John 20:21). Moreover, the office that He was born into and anointed into — as the Christ, as we heard last week — was His saving office. The prophet told us that He was sent with a commission *“to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives”* (Isa. 61:1).

Now, we know that for it has been preached to us; Luke has already told us all about this Savior, Christ the Lord, born of Mary, but the ordinary people Jesus encountered then would not have known it. And so, Jesus needed to show forth who He was by His manner and His actions.

In fact, by His teaching Jesus exuded authority. Jesus didn't just speak powerful words; His words were filled with power. The people recognized it and were astonished by it.

Jesus exuded authority, and Jesus' words performed amazing signs and wonders. Today, we hear of several: with a word, Jesus rebuked an unclean spirit: *“Be silent and come out of him!”* And the demonic spirit did.

Next Jesus went to the house of Simon Peter, and Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. They asked for Jesus' help, and he gave it — He rebuked the fever, and it left her immediately, and she began to serve them.

More people brought their sick and demon-possessed to Jesus, and He healed them all, laying hands on some, silencing the demons with more powerful rebukes.

For these people, Jesus put on display His word, filled with Divine power to heal and cleanse, and in this way Jesus showed Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God. The office was already His, and He showed that He was that officeholder by these displays of Divine power.

Indeed, Jesus makes this very clear in an encounter that happens a bit later in Luke chapter 5, namely through Jesus' healing of "*a man who was paralyzed*" (Luke 5:18). Here Jesus begins by proclaiming the man forgiven: "*Man, your sins are forgiven you*" (v. 20). And when the Jewish leaders complained, saying, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*", Jesus answered them, saying, "*that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*"—*he said to the man who was paralyzed—'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.'*" And the man did. Jesus displayed the power that bore witness to His authority.

For us mere mortals, too, power generally emanates from authority. To be sure, in emergency situations some people are just natural leaders and can command authority and get people to follow their commands, even though they hold no office. But ordinarily, the power flows from authority. The President gives an order, and people obey it because he is the President. A police officer turns his lights on and signals for you to pull over, and you do it, because you know the police officer has the authority to put you in jail if you do not. Luther says that "it is our duty to honor" these "fathers in office," "who have the care of the country," not just "fathers in blood," "and to value them greatly as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth" (Large Catechism, The Fourth Commandment, 150, 158).

But not every exercise of power is a legitimate use of authority — not even by someone as powerful as the President. We saw that recently as the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the President's order to use OSHA to enforce vaccine mandates for certain businesses. Or again, you might remember last year's battles around the country for the right to worship, governors in some states forbidding churches from gathering for worship — an exercise of power exceeding the authority of their office. The Supreme Court at length ruled in favor of the churches. The orders were unconstitutional.

When it comes to within the church, too, there is an office through which God does His work, dispenses His grace, expands His kingdom — it's the Office of the Ministry. Luther calls those in this office our "spiritual fathers" (158). These ministers of the Gospel have had this office bestowed upon them by God through the church to do His bidding. They have an authority that they exercise on behalf of the congregation — we sometimes call it the Office of the Keys. But you remember what this is — today we say it like this: "it is that special authority

which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant ...”; we used to say it like this: “it is the peculiar church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent”

It is an authority that emanates from an Office. I've told you before that I have been challenged by uncatechized non-Lutherans who balk at the sound of the pastor forgiving sins. These I have to try to teach briefly what the Bible says and what we say, for Jesus does authorize His church to forgive and retain sins: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld”* (John 20:23); or again, Jesus says, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matt. 16:19). For I can't display the kind of power Jesus did to validate my authority. I must point to Jesus' authorization in the Scriptures.

Again, as we teach, this is not an authority given to an individual (Peter alone), but to the Church, and the Church confers the public exercise of this authority to her pastors in the Office of the Ministry. Thus, you won't hear a Lutheran pastor say, “I, by virtue of my person” or “I, by virtue of my pious faith” or other irrelevancies, but “I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the word ... and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you” (Absolution, *Lutheran Service Book*, Divine Service, setting 3).

From this office comes also the public preaching of the word — yes, everyone can share the Gospel with friends, relatives, and acquaintances, but the public preaching is done by one in the Office. Similarly, baptisms are generally done publicly at the Divine Service by the pastor; and the Lord's Supper is done only by a pastor for the sake of the people.

The authority and power in all of this — done by Christ's command — is Christ's Himself. The same authority and power that amazed the people in Jesus' day should amaze us still — these are marvelous things given to us for our good — the authority comes still from Christ's office and institution; the power comes still by Christ's command and word of promise.

Rejoice! By these are dispensed the blessings of Christ's well fought fight: our forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.