

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The start of a new school year can be exciting. The long middle can be drudgery, but the start is usually exciting: kids coming back to school, new clothes, new book bags filled with new school supplies, coming back to school but to a new room and a new teacher. The teachers know it, and they know they have to have an orderly classroom if learning is going to take place. The teacher must establish it; she must establish her authority right away, or it's going to be a long year.

Jesus began His ministry not only preaching "*repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:15), but also teaching. Jesus' classroom was the synagogue. That's where He taught, and He got the people's attention. He established order in His classroom right away. He manifested His authority. And the people were astounded.

It wouldn't be the last time, either. As Jesus approached the climactic events of His arrest and execution, He would assert His authority again, overturning the moneychangers' tables in the temple, withering a fig tree. The "*chief priests and the scribes and the elders*" challenged His authority: "*By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?*"

"Who do you think You are, Jesus?" they were asking Him, as earlier He had been asked, "*Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?*" (John 8:53). Jesus established His bona fides then: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:58). "*I AM the Lord.*"

"Who do you think You are, Jesus?" "*Are you greater than our father Jacob?*" (John 4:12), the Samaritan woman at the well asked Him. He answered her, "*The water that I will give ... will become ... a spring of water welling up to eternal life*" (John 4:14). Jesus established His authority with her: "*I who speak to you am he*" (John 4:26), "*the Messiah*" who is come, the one who "*is called Christ*" (John 4:25).

"Who do you think You are, Jesus?" "Are You greater than the prophet Moses?" Interesting that this question never gets asked of Jesus. John the Baptist was asked, "*Are you the Prophet?*" (John 1:21), that is, the "*prophet like [Moses]*" that we heard about in the Old Testament lesson, the prophet to whom the people were to listen. John was asked, but Jesus never was.

Nevertheless, Jesus was indeed greater than Moses, as the Son is greater than a servant. Jesus Himself doesn't answer this question, but the writer to the Hebrews does: "*Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ...*"

*Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son*" (Heb. 3:3-6).

And that is saying something, for Israel saw amazing things through Moses: awesome plagues, a mighty deliverance, miraculous bread and quail, and the Law handed down on the mountain.

Jesus may not have been asked if He considered Himself greater than Moses, but He established it nonetheless, not by giving the people more laws, but by teaching the people what the law of Moses really meant: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, ... But I say to you ..."* (Matt. 5:21-22), and by reminding them of God's unyielding standard: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matt. 5:48).

Jesus came as One greater than Moses, establishing an authority greater than Moses', for Jesus came not as an abolisher of the law, but as the fulfiller of the law (Matt. 5:17). Jesus came and did what Moses was unable to do — obey the law completely. I'm sure you remember that Moses was prevented from entering the promised land because of His disobedience.

And Jesus did more. You recall how Moses instructed the people to offer up their sacrifices, and even the priests had to offer up their sacrifices repeatedly to sanctify themselves before they entered the most holy place. Jesus came not with the blood of goats and bulls into an earthly tent, but with His own blood, Jesus entered into the heavenly tabernacle, with the blood of a Lamb without blemish. He offered up the sacrifice once and for all, securing for us an eternal redemption, opening the way for us to enter into our promised heavenly rest.

"Who do you think You are, Jesus?" "Are you greater than the scribes and Pharisees who *'sit on Moses' seat'*" (Matt. 23:2)? Here is where the people really noticed the difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. Here Jesus truly established His authority with the people — how differently Jesus taught! Not like the scribes and Pharisees who *"tie[d] up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and [laid] them on people's shoulders, but they themselves [were] not willing to move them with their finger"* (Matt. 23:4), not like the scribes and Pharisees who *"preach[ed], but [did] not practice"* (Matt. 23:3), not like the scribes and Pharisees who quoted rabbi after rabbi as their authority but neglected Moses and the Prophets, not like the scribes and Pharisees whose teaching was lifeless, for it did not contain the words of eternal life.

Yes, Jesus taught with authority — Divine authority. He was indeed the Son of God come down from heaven; He was the Christ, David's son and David's Lord; He was indeed the Prophet speaking forth the very words of God filled with His power.

Jesus established His authority with the people, not because a man with an unclean spirit claimed to know Jesus of Nazareth and proclaimed Him “*the Holy One of God*,” but because Jesus by His Divine power rebuked them and muzzled them and ordered them out, and they obeyed. “*A new teaching with authority!*” That’s the new teaching: Jesus came to destroy the power of the devil, the guilt of sin, the fear of death. That’s cross and resurrection language—serpent crushing, sin forgiving, death conquering, authoritative language: “*it is finished*” (John 19:30) — Jesus “*delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Rom. 4:25).

But what about today? “Who do you think you are, Pastor?” That’s the question sometimes asked today as people hear pastors preach the word and forgive sins in the name of Jesus. What gives you the authority?

The authority comes from the One who in our Gospel today showed that He had the authority and taught with authority. Jesus conveys this authority as He sends out pastors to teach people to observe all that He commanded, as He sends them out to baptize, as He sends them out to forgive sins. “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore ...*,” Jesus said (Matt. 28:19). “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,*” Jesus said (John 20:21). Here 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 as long as they do not repent” (Luther’s Small Catechism, Office of the Keys, Part I). And so Christ through His church conveys this authority to pastors to exercise on their behalf.

Therefore, pastors preach an efficacious word today, not because they are powerful themselves, but because the Gospel word of Jesus is. It remains an authoritative and powerful word today — it’s “*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Rom. 1:16). It is what is added to water to make it not plain water but a baptism that casts out unclean spirits and makes room for the Holy Spirit, that gives rebirth into the kingdom of heaven, that unites sinners, whom Christ redeemed by His cross, to His death and resurrection, that “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare” (Luther’s Small Catechism, Baptism, Part II). Jesus’ instituting words are added to bread and wine that He might join His body and His blood to these lowly elements and bestow forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to those who eat and drink worthily, acknowledging their sins and discerning Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament.

Ignatius, 1<sup>st</sup> century bishop of Antioch, famously called the Sacrament, the “medicine of immortality” (Epistle to the Ephesians). Pope Francis takes up this metaphor when he compares the church to a “field hospital” where the wounded are treated — and the medicine is the forgiveness of sins — a good metaphor.

The church is also a classroom hearing from her teacher, listening to His authoritative word, learning from Him. As all good teachers do, God establishes order in His church, for “*God is not a God of confusion,*” and He wants “*all things ... done decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). And so He establishes the office of the Holy Ministry to preach and teach Jesus’ word, to baptize, to forgive, and to serve the New Testament in Christ’s blood. These seemingly ordinary things are anything but ... each Lord’s Day, they are Christ’s ever new teaching and with authority. God grant that we receive them as such, and with amazement, and then go forth to spread His fame “*everywhere throughout all the surrounding region.*”

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