

**Foundations: AUTHORITY**  
**Luke 4:31-37 (AFBC 1/7/18)**

Welcome to the first Sunday of 2018—our first opportunity to worship together in this new year. We had to wait a while—it's already day 7—and a lot has happened since last year!\*\*\*

Here's wishing all of you a very happy new year; and may we all experience the bounty of God's blessing as we make our way through this year together.

Now, some of you noticed that we spent a lot of time in the Old Testament last year. For over half the year, we focused on foundational passages of Scripture from the book of Genesis—the book of beginnings—with an emphasis on some foundational people, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

We begin the new year by turning to the New Testament and some foundational passages from the Gospels—Scriptures that help us understand who Jesus Christ is and what He does for us because of who He is. This will be our emphasis at least through Easter and into the month of April.

Early in the Gospels, we read about Jesus calling his first disciples. We hear how He transformed his first followers from fishers of fish into fishers of people.

He invited the twelve to come and be with Him daily, and in the process, to learn from His words and from His example; and they did! For three and a half years, at great personal risk and sacrifice, they followed Jesus.

Then, after His death and resurrection, they continued to be faithful to Jesus Christ. They not only followed Him personally, they enthusiastically invited others to do the same—to become followers of Jesus.

So... what gave Jesus the right to expect so much of these disciples, along with all the others who chose to follow Him—including those of us who chose to follow Him today?

Why did they agree to this? Why did they accept the challenge that Jesus put before them? And friends, why should we? Let's turn to our text for today. It's found in **Luke 4:31-37**. Hopefully, we will find some answers to these questions.

**<sup>31</sup> Then he (Jesus) went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. <sup>32</sup> They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority. <sup>33</sup> In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, <sup>34</sup> “Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”**

**<sup>35</sup> “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. <sup>36</sup> All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!” <sup>37</sup> And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.**

People were amazed by what Jesus said and what He did. No one had ever before spoken and acted like this—meaning, with such authority... and power. They wanted to see more of Jesus, and hear more of what He had to say.

Ask yourself this: have you ever amazed anyone? Simply by something you said or did, has there ever been a time when someone, for whatever reason, found your life to be amazing?

Probably the best shot most of us ever had at amazing anyone was when we were young children... and spending time with our grandparents. Am I right?

Our grandparents found everything we did to be amazing. Some of this affect diminished a bit as we got a bit older, of course--but any accomplishments continued to make them very proud of us. Thank you, God, for grandparents!

Actually, there may be another brief window of opportunity for someone to find us amazing. It's when some little person who calls us mom or dad looks up at us with a degree of amazement because they see us as their authority, if you will, on everything.

For a time, if we're loving, nurturing parents, our children believe that no matter what question arises, we'll know the answer. Mom and Dad know everything! And what a head-trip that is—until we begin to realize what a heavy responsibility it is—to be looked up to like that—to be trusted so completely.

If we're wise, we realize that we cannot possibly measure up to the task. And if we're people of faith, we're reminded of how important it is to have the right authority for our own lives.

It can't be us. We're not smart enough. Our knowledge and our perspectives on life are simply too limited. And this is not just true when it comes to parenting. This is true in every important aspect of our lives.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, people recognized there was something different about Him. They were finding what he did and what he said to be unlike anything they had ever heard or experienced before:

- 1) When Jesus was baptized—Scripture says the Heavenly Father placed His stamp of approval on His Son.
- 2) In our text for today, Jesus commanded evil spirits to leave a man and they did.
- 3) When Jesus taught people the things of God, He spoke truths that no one had ever told them before and they were amazed at what He said.

In all these ways and more, those who first heard him found in Jesus an authority like no other—a Guide for living that many of them began to realize they needed for their lives. They understood that life with Jesus, life lived His way, was far better than life without Jesus, or life lived their own way.

Soon, Jesus was being asked to speak at local synagogues. People would show up like it was just another Sabbath, but when Jesus starting speaking, they knew something was different.

They often had visiting teachers to speak; but none of them had ever said things like what Jesus was saying. He didn't sound anything like those other scribes or rabbis.

- 1) Their teaching was rather tentative and uncertain.
- 2) They would begin each sentence with "Perhaps" or "It's been said" or "It might be the case that..."
- 3) They would cite this rabbi, and then another.
- 4) They quoted traditions they had committed to memory; and they put footnotes on everything they said.

This is simply the way they taught. And the people, no doubt, were expecting much the same from this new teacher--from Jesus.

But--surprise!--when Jesus spoke, it was like a breath of fresh air. For "Jesus," we're told, "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

They were astonished by what He did and amazed at what he said! Jesus broke away from the old way of doing things, and we hear this several times in Scripture: Jesus did this with authority. So... this is something foundational to our understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus—He spoke and acted with authority.

It's interesting, I think, that we're not always told *what* Jesus said on these occasions. Instead, the Bible affirms that people recognized that Jesus had the authority to say it--whatever it was.

Earlier I mentioned Jesus' baptism. In the very first chapter of his Gospel, Mark tells us this about what happened when Jesus was baptised (**Mark 1: 9-11**): **9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

This was something brand new. People began waking up to this special thing God was doing. Mark tells us several times in his account of Jesus' life that people were amazed by Jesus, and they realized that He was speaking and acting with an authority that they had never witnessed before.

Jesus, you see, was speaking with the authority that came to him in those words of His Heavenly Father at His baptism: **"You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**

In that powerful moment, Jesus' mission was affirmed and He received His Father's blessing. He could now speak and act with divine authority.

I mentioned earlier how children often amaze their grandparents. Sometimes, though, they say and do things that amaze us all. I'm reminded a story that a Preschool teacher in a former church I served shared with me. This goes all the way back to Roanoke, Virginia, in fact.

The teacher came to my office to tell me about a conversation she'd overheard between a three year old and a four year old. I need to tell you about these two children:

The 4-year-old was a child whose parents regularly took him to Sunday school and worship. He had spent the first 4 years of his life in and around the church and parents whose faith was important to them.

The 3-year-old, however, belonged to a family who didn't attend church. His only exposure to faith and the church was in our preschool--and he was still rather new to that.

One morning, the children were singing songs like "Jesus loves me, this I know," and "Jesus loves the little children of the world." Many of us grew up singing these songs, and we can still sing them now.

But on this morning, as the children were singing, the 3-year-old asks the 4-year-old: "Who's this Jesus we keep singing about?"

And Marylou, the teacher, told me that as she was trying to think how she should respond to this child, the little 4-year-old, without any hesitation, said: "He's God's Son; and God made the world; and he made us; and he loves us."

And to this profound theological statement, she said the little 3-year-old replied, "Oh!" That's all he said, "Oh."

Now there were no songs about Jesus that day at the synagogue in Capernaum. But no doubt, as Jesus spoke to those gathered there, and as he healed that demon-possessed man, somebody had to ask, "Who is this Jesus?"

And although there were no 4-year-olds around to say, "He God's Son," Jesus spoke and acted with such authority, that message began to get through to people.

When he spoke, people realized there was a special relationship between Jesus and God – an awe-inspiring intimacy between the two of them--not like their usual teachers at all. They recognized in Jesus one who had first-hand knowledge of God.

Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus said on this occasion, but He probably told them something like this:

- 1) "I've just come from God, and I'll tell you what He's like. He's like a shepherd who lost a sheep, and he spent day and night searching every ravine and gully, until he found that lost sheep and got him home.
- 2) Maybe He told them about the Father's house, where there are no tears, or pain, or darkness, but only joy and light in God's presence.
- 3) I suppose he said something about how God accepts them as they are, and that He's anxious to forgive them. In fact, He'll come running out to meet them and welcome them home when they finally decide to return to Him—and... He said that we're also to treat each other this way.
- 4) He assured them that God looks after them just like He does the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, so they shouldn't worry so much.

And I guess the people's response was a lot like that little 3-year-old boy's. They said, "Oh!" They were amazed at his teachings—because they knew He was speaking with authority.

When Jesus approached the man who was possessed by evil spirits, all that evil inside of him called out: "Let us alone, Jesus. What do you want with us? Are you here to destroy us--is that it?"

But Jesus told the man to be quiet. He wasn't there to destroy him, but rather to rid his life of this evil. "Come out of him!" Jesus said. The one who spoke with such authority now acted with authority to free this poor man from his afflictions. "The man cried out with a loud voice," we're told, "and the unclean spirit left him."

And again, the people said, "Oh." They were amazed--for with authority, he commanded even the unclean spirits, and they obeyed him.

Then and now, Jesus Christ speaks with authority--if we'll just listen. He tells us how life is to be lived at its very best. Jesus speaks with authority when he says that:

- a) Forgiveness is better than resentment;
- b) Love is better than hate;
- c) Giving is more blessed than receiving;
- d) Prayer does bring strength to our lives;
- e) And trust in God is abundantly rewarded.

Jesus speaks with authority on such matters, and those of us who have placed our faith in Him know that He's right—that His words are true—that He is, in fact, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

We've discovered that when we place our trust in Him, He also casts demons out of our lives—the fear and worry, the insecurities and self-centeredness—all those things that get in the way of our relationships with each other, and with God.

Here's the question we all need to ask ourselves: who's our authority? Right now—who is it? Are we guilty of trying fill that role ourselves—or fill it with someone else who's clearly not up to the job?

Do we think anybody else knows better than the Lord how our lives should be lived, how we're to relate to those around us, how we're to manage our time, talent, and money. In general, do we think there's some other authority in this world who's better able to guide us when it comes to what's most important in life?

Friends, that never works. Our knowledge is too limited and our power's too small. We need Jesus Christ in our lives. We need His wisdom, His strength, His authority and truth—we need Jesus.

Only Jesus can speak to our deepest needs. Only Jesus can cleanse our lives of sin, fill in all the hollow places, and make us whole.

Will you receive Jesus Christ today? Will you trust Him as your Savior, and listen to Him, learn from Him, and follow Him as your authority--as Lord of your life? Do this, and I'm so sure that you'll find Him to be amazing as well.