

## *Jesus heals and preaches with authority*

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*Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28*

Each week of Epiphany is meant to be a “little epiphany” where something more is made know about Jesus and his mission as Son of God.

This week we find Jesus teaching ‘with authority’ and then silencing and cleansing an ‘unclean spirit’ which was controlling a man. Again Jesus surprises the crowd because of his ‘new teaching—with authority’.

(Authority; Australian of the Year, Prof Ian Frazer... his authority comes from years of research, committment, learning, dedication)

The ‘authority’ of Jesus indicated that he was indeed ‘the prophet’ spoken of in the Old Testament reading. Obvious depth of understanding of his subject.

The words of Moses in our first reading from Deuteronomy “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet (it may be prophets!) like me from among your own people, you shall heed such a prophet.”

Originally the word ‘prophet’ stood for the prophetic office ththe whole prophetic tradition and movement which was exercised by a series of prophets in Israel. The recorder of this message of Moses understood the prophets to be a succession from Moses under God’s Spirit — all the prophets including Isaiah and Jeremiah etc. but eventually THE ‘prophet’ was believed the one FINAL prophet sent by God to usher in the end.

It seems Jesus’ understanding was in line with this because he understood his mission in terms of proclaiming the dawning of God’s Kingdom, and himself as the last messenger before it’s consummation.

The early church obviously saw Jesus as the end of the succession of prophets! Peter’s speech to the crowd at the temple in Acts ch.3 indicates that he (and therefore others) believed that Jesus was this prophet. So we have an image of Jesus as the last in the line of God’s prophets which began with Moses.

When I looked at hymns for this week which connected with the readings, I came across hymn 483 “Long ago prophets knew”! It is the last hymn today! When you read it you will find that it is decidedly “Christmassy” and I wondered about how it connected with the gospel! It seems however that it is chosen because it reflects the idea that Jesus comes as the end of the prophetic tradition

1. Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new,  
bear his people’s burden,  
freely love and pardon.  
*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*when he comes, who will make him*  
*welcome?*

2. God in time, God in man,  
this is God’s timeless plan:

he will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
God divinely human.

*Refrain*

3. Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb God is laid.  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected.

*Refrain*

4. Journey ends: where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,

stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour do not tarry.

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes,  
Jesus comes,  
we will make him welcome.*

When I thought I would use it the last verse did not seem to fit with our Epiphany theme of Christ being 'made known' so I have rewritten the last verse to read:

Journey ends: where afar  
Bethlern shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
Jesus, Son of Mary,  
Saviour, we are ready.

To indicate that the child Jesus does not continue in the stable but goes into the world to encounter us AND that we are to be ready to encounter him.

It is thought that Jesus was mostly seen as the 'great prophet' and titles for such as Lord, Son of God, and Word later replaced it!

What we discover in the gospel following the calling of the first disciples is that Jesus begins his public ministry, the first thing we hear about this ministry is his **teaching** ministry AND an **exorcism**! Although Mark does not tell us the content of Jesus teaching he does emphasize it and indicates its 'authority'. 'Authority' (Greek *exousia*) means 'power' and it is demonstrated in teaching and the casting out of the unclean spirit. It is a power NOT evident in the teaching and ministry of the scribes! To me it is the power of one who is so filled with the Spirit and at one with the Father.

Just as Moses the first prophet spoke God's word to Pharoah and then was the agent of redemption, so too is Jesus — speaking God's word of power AND bringing redemption to the man! Now I have had little experience of what the New Testament calls 'unclean spirits' ... although now I think about it I seem to have met plenty of people whose spirits were 'unclean' because of hatred, prejudice and confusion (and many other conditions). I think of the demonic as that which demeans a person's life — it is that which God in Christ seeks to redeem and restore!

Pray that we may speak and act in the lives of many who are demeaned! (Pause)

Evidently the Corinthians in today's second reading were at loggerheads because some of great faith and confident personality had eaten the food offered to did not see that a problem existed! Others however whose faith was somewhat different and a little more fragile found this offensive. Paul therefore asks that this not become a problem and encourages his readers to take care to redeem such situations. Paul commits himself to causing no offence by eating the food! Talking about things and seeking God's authority when we speak to each other about issues is of utmost importance! So is acting with God's authority to redeem situations!

Authority is about walking the walk as well as talking the talk. We do not trust the authority of those whose life and experience do not measure up. Would we take tennis lessons from someone who never played? The power and Authority we seek comes from our lives lived and reflected upon our walk with God; our being disciples of Jesus, and our openness to the Spirit.

Our time in prayer and meditation is the way of seeking God's power to speak and act to share the ministry of Christ the prophet