

Giving God Authority Over Our Lives – 2/1/2009

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ever since I was a small child I've always had this vivid image of Jesus casting out demons. My grandmother would share different Bible stories with my brothers and me creating a picture in each of our heads. She painted a picture in which, Jesus would stand up – back straight and his finger pointing to the person who was possessed by the demon and would speak in an authoritative tone of voice that would command the demon to come out of the person they were inflicting. And, of course, after Jesus spoke the demon would come out reluctantly.

This vivid image in my head always reminds me that Jesus had authority over the unclean spirit or demon.

This morning we heard that Jesus was teaching in Capernaum at the synagogue with authority. While he was teaching a man entered with an unclean Spirit. Jesus told the unclean spirit to come out of the man. After he did this many were amazed at his authority and his teaching and Jesus' name began to spread throughout Galilee.

Even though the unclean spirit challenged Jesus' words – Jesus prevailed. His authority over the spirit couldn't be matched.

As I thought and prayed about all of our texts for today the thought of God having authority and control kept coming to the front of my mind. As humans I think we want to have the say over our lives. We want to make the choices on the activities we participate in, how we spend our money, how we raise our children, who we spend time with, and how we spend our time. These aren't bad things, but I wonder if we allow unclean spirits or temptations to help in our decision making.

I imagine unclean spirits would persuade us to ignore our relationship with God. The game on TV is more appealing than attending worship or bible study. I can also envision unclean spirits saying its okay to spend more than you can afford to get what you want. Overall, I can see where unclean spirits would want our focus on ourselves and not for others.

I wonder what would happen if we challenged the unclean spirits in our lives and gave authority and control to God.

I ask you to think for a moment. How much control have you given to Christ over your life?

Jesus had authority over the unclean spirit. The unclean spirit challenged Jesus' authority. From there, Jesus silenced the Spirit and commanded it to come out.

I often wonder how much we challenge God. I know personally I'll argue with God from time to time about what he asks me to do. When God asks us to do something do we ignore him or come up with 1,001 excuses why we can't do what he is asking of us. We are reluctant to give our lives – our whole lives to God.

If God had total authority over our lives – what would our lives look like? I imagine our lives might be quite different. We might seek the good in others. We may look out for the general welfare of all people not just ourselves or a select group. We would probably put others' needs before our own.

I can also imagine that there might be a passion among us to study the scriptures and to spend time in conversation with God through prayer. Worship and praise to God would be a daily occurrence, not just Sunday morning.

If we gave God authority and control over our lives there would be transformation. We would grow as disciples by being open to new opportunities.

Another question we can ask in relation to giving God authority and control over our lives is: is our Sunday world different from our Monday world? Do we live our daily lives demonstrating God's love to others? Is there time for worship and praise outside of Sunday morning?

As I thought about the question is our Sunday world different than our Monday world, I couldn't help but think of our epistle lesson where Paul reminds the Corinthians that their freedom in Christ does not give them an opportunity to participate in non-Christian behavior because of the knowledge they possess. Rather those with knowledge are to respond out of love for the sake of all believers. Paul encourages us to think about our actions for the good of all.

To act out love for the good of others is part of giving God authority and control over our lives. Paul reminds us that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

When we are tempted by unclean spirits in our lives we need to remember that others are watching. Our children, grandchildren, any children that we encounter are like sponges soaking up everything we do. Our habits are passed to others. If we visit an elderly neighbor or give food to the local food pantry, that act of love is seen and caught by many. Our example to everyone – those we love and know well and those we don't know are important. Our actions can speak louder than words.

I encourage us to think and pray about what it means to give God authority and control over our lives. What would change in your life? What would remain the same? What kind of disciple would you become?

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.