

LENTEN SERIES 2019
SEVEN DAYS TO GLORY: Holy Week
First Presbyterian Church
Week 2—“Tuesday: By What Authority?”

INTRODUCTION

In this Lenten Series, we will explore the particulars of each day during what we know as “Holy Week”—the seven days to Easter following Jesus’ Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The writer follows the chronology as recorded in Mark’s gospel.

This week we will explore Tuesday ...

Scripture:

Matthew 21:23-27; 22:15-22

Mark 11:27-33, 12:13-17

Luke 20:1-8, 20-26

Now, it may not be the most memorable, but *Tuesday* is by far the busiest day of Holy Week. The writer of Mark’s gospel devotes almost three chapters to this particular day’s events alone—events that help us better understand much more clearly how Jesus walked a fine line between the needs, desires, dreams, and will of the common people, and the religious authorities who viewed Jesus as a major threat to their power and control.

By now, Jesus has already dug a hole (so to speak). Really, he’s been digging a hole for a long time because of all he’s been saying and doing up in Galilee. But, that mostly affected his opponents and detractors outside of Jerusalem. However, he’s finally in hot water with his enemies from Jerusalem as well because of his perceived showboating on what we call *Palm Sunday*, when he asserted his divine kingship and identity as the Messiah by how he entered the holy city. Then he really rubbed the authorities the wrong way with his “temple-tantrum” on Monday. The stage is set for a confrontation.

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

And, in our gospel stories today from Mark, the religious authorities probably think they’ve got Jesus right where they want him. They’ve laid a couple of good traps you see—one religious trap and one political trap.

- ✦ First, the Jerusalem religious leaders challenge his religious authority.
 - After all, they didn’t have his ordination certificate on file,
 - and they know Jesus never went through the same amount of rigorous religious training as they had.
 - In their minds, if Jesus was truly a rabbi, it was by title only
 - because at one point everyone knew him not as a rabbi,
 - but as a carpenter from the backwater town of Nazareth.

- So they ask him point blank, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?”
- And, Jesus deftly sidesteps their question and poses one of his own:
 - “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”
 - If the religious leaders say “from heaven” then they will be exposed as hypocrites because they are trying to discredit Jesus
 - If they say “of human origin” then they will have to face the crowd who are enamored and enthralled with Jesus (and the religious leaders are afraid of the crowd!)
- ⚡ Then, secondly, the Pharisees and supporters of the Roman puppet king, Herod, (basically his opponents from Galilee combined with some other Jerusalem leaders) set out to disprove his authority in a political way by deceitfully asking Jesus about paying taxes to the Roman emperor.
 - Now, If Jesus says pay your taxes,
 - then he pleases Herod and Rome and enrages the crowds.
 - And, if Jesus says don’t pay your taxes,
 - then he will be guilty of civil disobedience—
 - the crowds will love it,
 - but the authorities will have a solid reason to hand Jesus over to the Romans.
 - Remember that fine line Jesus walked?

And, in both instances, Jesus is able to stand firm and provide answers without implicating himself, and all it does is drive these so-called “religious authorities” even more crazy! In the second story, we are even told that the authorities are “utterly amazed at him”—dazzled and bewildered and befuddled is more like it.

So it begs the question even more—by what authority did Jesus do these things, and who gave him such authority?

WHAT THINGS?

Well, let’s think about what types of “these things” we are talking about. The religious authorities may just be talking about what Jesus has done on Sunday and Monday—his entry into Jerusalem and his “temple-tantrum.”

- ⚡ But, I think it’s more than that.
- ⚡ As I wrote earlier, Jesus has been digging a hole for a long time because of all he’s been saying and doing throughout his ministry—
 - divinely inspired things that are recorded from the beginning of the gospels to this point in Holy Week:
 - teaching, healing, purging evil spirits,
 - eating with sinners, associating with outcasts, forgiving sins,
 - calming storms, walking on water,
 - feeding thousands of people with hardly nothing—

- basically doing everything that a self-appointed, earthly leader couldn't do!
- ✦ But, Jesus is not self-appointed—
 - he's God-appointed,
 - he's God's anointed Son,
 - and he spoke for God, as God,
 - in every place he ever visited
 - and with every person he ever encountered—
- ✦ in that lay his authority.

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

As followers of Jesus Christ today, we have the profound benefit of having the scriptures at our fingertips.

- ✦ We have the benefit of seeing Jesus' life and ministry in hindsight, and as the saying goes, hindsight is always 20/20.
 - For we have the benefit of knowing not just all Jesus accomplished, but how he came to be in the first place.
 - We can read the birth narratives and make the connections with ancient prophecies.
 - We can follow the genealogies in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and trace Jesus' kingship back to King David and beyond.
 - And, even more than that, we know from two thousand years of history how the resurrection changed the world.
- ✦ That's the source of authority that Jesus claims—
 - for he truly was Emmanuel, "God with us,"
 - and we believe that God became flesh and dwelt among us.

WHAT AUTHORITY DOES JESUS HAVE IN OUR LIVES?

So the questions I want all of us to think about today are thus—

- ✦ lifting up what we believe and know to be true about Jesus,
 - in what ways does Jesus have authority in our lives?
 - In our church?
 - In our actions?
 - In our work and play and more?
- ✦ Think about it ... do we come to church on Sunday mornings as much as we do because it feels good inside—because we get brownie points with God?
- ✦ Do we give of ourselves—our time, our talent, and our treasure—because church is a more convenient charity than other non-profits, and our financial giving helps increase our itemized deductions at tax time?
- ✦ And, are we nice to people we meet because we were raised to have good manners and be respectful of our elders?

Or, do we do all those things and so much more because ...

- ✦ in addition to being good people, we are also God's people,
- ✦ and because following Jesus matters to us and to our world,

- ✦ and because we are saved by God's grace and called to respond with gratitude to God in all we say and do—
 - doing divinely inspired things like
 - teaching, healing, purging evil spirits,
 - eating with sinners, associating with outcasts, forgiving sins,
 - calming storms, and feeding thousands of people, and more?

Because we do all those things and more every day, every week, every month around here! *And, by what authority do we do those things?*

- ✦ It was the question then, and it is still the question now.
- ✦ Well, we do them,
 - not because it feels good
 - or because of brownie points
 - or because of tax deductions,
- ✦ but because Jesus
 - is the Christ,
 - the Messiah,
 - the Son of the living God.
- ✦ He is our Savior, our Lord, and our God.