

Epiphany 4, January 28, 2018
Text: Mark 1:21-28
Theme: RESPECT MY AUTHORITY!

I'm sure none of you have ever watched inappropriate television. Nor have I of course, BUT I am told that there is a show called "South Park" about a group of children who live in Colorado and make the Little Rascals look like choirboys. One of the main characters on "South Park" is named Eric Cartman and for those of you who are a bit older, Eric Cartman is a cartoon version of Archie Bunker. He is a racist, foul-mouthed, arrogant little boy who like Archie Bunker of my day, raises issues of this day and attacks the political correctness of our time with wild abandon. One of his most famous phrases is "Respect my authority," which he pronounces authoritah. As the character develops, we learn that Cartman wants respect more than anything and thinks that he will get it through bluster, bravado and demands from all to do so. Like Archie Bunker, with his yelling and name calling, tried to make everyone respect his position, so Cartman does the same thing with the people and issues of today.

Authority is a funny thing. It is difficult to acquire it by demanding it. It is in fact very similar to respect in that it cannot be demanded but must be earned. Respect comes from a word that means to look back at or regard. In other words, as people look back at our actions and words, they will either see us as worthy or unworthy. The word authority comes from the same root as the word author. So one is an authority when he has created something around the thing on which he is an authority. I am an authority on theology because I have spent time in the field studying,

reading and writing about it and people will look back on my work and either respect it or not depending on the worth or lack thereof. I cannot demand that you respect my authority. I can only do what I do and let the evaluation of my work speak one way or another. Cartman and Archie Bunker don't get it. They think you can bully people into respecting your authority.

So that brings us to Jesus. What did Mark mean when he said Jesus taught them as one who had authority and not like the scribes? Jesus taught as the author of what he was teaching. They respected his authority because upon looking back from their own lives, they could see that unlike the scribes who were only reporting on what they had previously heard and been taught, Jesus was teaching as one who had been there and done that.

The secret of true authority, Biblically speaking, is that it has to come from the author or it is dangerous. So when someone says that God wants us to be rich and powerful, we have to ask if the Bible supports that statement. Nowhere do I see God desiring his people to be rich and powerful. All I see is calls for sacrifice. The author says that we are to give up the things of this world or use them to serve him, not luxuriate in them.

Jesus showed up in the Synagogue in Capernaum and began teaching as all rabbi's do. Except, people noticed immediately that he taught differently from the other rabbi's. He was not repeating what he had learned. He was proclaiming something new; something no one had ever

heard before – grace and forgiveness for free. See we have heard about free grace for so long that it has become old hat to us. But Jesus proclaimed this concept to people who lived under the constant threat of punishment. Not only would they potentially be punished eternally, but they could be punished immediately as well. Technically, they still lived under Levitical law where a person could be stoned for certain sins and, although it was difficult to impose the death penalty under Roman rule, they would certainly be ostracized by the community. Jesus, however, proclaims grace, forgiveness and love.

Of course the goal was always for the Messiah to come, and when he came, he would proclaim peace, love and joy. But Jesus was doing it. He was proclaiming the reign and rule of the Messiah to be present now in their hearing! Why would that not be seen as wonderful news? Why wouldn't all the priests and teachers of the law rejoice that their work was complete and Jesus reigned?

Well, let's go back to Eric Cartman and Archie Bunker. The scribes and the Pharisees were invested in their own authority and they wanted to people to respect it! They did not want things to change. They did not want people to live free and forgiven because if that were so, what would their authority mean? No one would respect their authority because their authority would be based on punishment that did not exist. Their authority was based on law and punishment not love.

A couple thousand years later and we still see a similar problem. In the modern world, we have not progressed so very much. We still have

politicians and religious leaders demanding respect for their authority but they have still failed to understand that the only authority that is worthy of respect is the authority that comes from the author. Only leaders who are speaking from the authority given to them from God are worth heeding beyond minor matters. If a civil leader says to pay more taxes, fine, money is a minor matter that is in the civil realm. But if a leader says that it is okay to kill children if they are inconvenient, then we must ignore him or her. Likewise, if a religious leader demands some pious work to prove our faith, we must ignore him or her. The only role of true leaders with real authority is to repeat the words of the author of all things.

Don't get all lathered up when people spout off about what you must do or what you cannot do. There is only one authority and he has been good enough to write it all down for us and the bottom line...the main theme of his 1,000 page plus document that we call the Bible...is love. Love him with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and love your neighbor as yourself. That was what astonished them when he taught. Who would have guessed that love is the point of it all? They were so busy demanding that people respect their authority that they had missed the love. Don't do likewise.