

A Question of Authority

4th Thursday of Lent



Mark 11:27-33

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?' Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.' They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" But shall we say, "Of human origin"?' —they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

Just who do you think you are? They wanted to know. What gives you the right to barge into the temple and disrupt the day-to-day operations by turning over tables and putting out legitimate merchants? Who was Jesus to turn things upside down? The temple was their turf. They were the authority there, but Jesus refused to be cowed.

Jesus acted on the authority of God's own commission and by his right as God's own Son. To have acknowledged this would have turned the lives and the enterprise of the religious leadership upside-down and inside-out. It would have meant re-thinking how they understood the world, their religious faith, and themselves, and they weren't prepared to do that. You and I can understand that, at least somewhat. It's one of the struggles that we have in submitting ourselves fully to Jesus' authority. Inevitably, when we do, we find ourselves engaging issues we thought we had settled; dealing with questions we had comfortably laid aside; hearing anew calls to love and service we had successfully resisted; and reassessing our values and priorities.

Living our lives under the authority of Jesus can sometimes be challenging, even turning our lives upside down and inside out, but it is also the source of our greatest freedom and joy.

Prayer

*My will is not my own till thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign.
It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant, and found in thee its life.*

George Matheson, 1842-1906