

Salford Methodist Circuit



Authority of Jesus - 31st January 2021
John Brocklehurst

Welcome to Worship.

Let us just have a few moments of silent reflection

[Silence]

We are called to recognise God's authority
and to submit to it in every area of our lives.
So, let us invite God to direct our thinking and our praying.
Let us give God the highest place in our lives.
And so let us come together to worship the living God as we sing together

Hymn: 'King of Glory, King of Peace, I Will Love Thee'

*King of Glory, King of Peace,
I will love thee;
and that love may never cease
I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request,
thou hast heard me;
thou didst note my working breast,
thou hast spared me.*

*Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing thee,
and the cream of all my heart
I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried,
thou didst clear me;
and alone, when they replied,
thou didst hear me.*

*Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise thee;
in my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort
to enrol thee:
e'en eternity's too short
to extol thee.*

Let us pray:

We thank you, Lord,

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that you are the source of all wisdom and ultimate authority.
Thank you that we can always test
what we hear in the world today against your holy word.
Thank you that in you, life's foundations are firm.
And when we fail to look to you,
we find ourselves on shaky ground and prone to making mistakes.
But when we do make mistakes,
you can help us correct them.
Thank you that when we walk closely with you,
our lives have an integrity and meaning
that can help bring ourselves and others into closer relationship with you.
Thanks be to you, our God.
Forgive us when our own words or actions don't marry with our calling. Help us
to speak and act with integrity at all times. Forgive us when we jump to wrong
conclusions. Forgive us for judging.
Jesus Christ,
By the authority of your holy name,
we can now freely approach God's throne knowing our sins are forgiven.
Praise you, Christ.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, source of all authority in heaven and earth,
eternal praise belongs to you for ever and ever.

Amen.

We join together in the family prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Hymn: The Right Hand Of God

*The right hand of God is writing in our land,
writing with power and with love;
our conflicts and our fears,
our triumphs and our tears,*



are recorded by the right hand of God.

*The right hand of God is pointing in our land,
pointing the way we must go;
so clouded is the way,
so easily we stray,
but we're guided by the right hand of God.*

*The right hand of God is striking in our land,
striking out at envy, hate and greed;
our selfishness and lust,
our pride and deeds unjust,
are destroyed by the right hand of God.*

*The right hand of God is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and lifted now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.*

*The right hand of God is healing in our land,
healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
so wondrous is its touch,
with love that means so much,
when we're healed by the right hand of God.*

*The right hand of God is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.*

First of all, a few words about Psalm 111.

This psalm is an alphabetic acrostic, in other words each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. It sets out a list of reasons to praise God, many emphasising that God is trustworthy and dependable.

Bible Reading: Psalm 111

Praise the Lord!

*With all my heart I will thank the Lord
in the assembly of his people.
How wonderful are the things the Lord does!
All who are delighted with them want to understand them.
All he does is full of honour and majesty;*



*his righteousness is eternal.
The Lord does not let us forget his wonderful actions;
he is kind and merciful.
He provides food for those who honour him;
he never forgets his covenant.
He has shown his power to his people
by giving them the lands of foreigners.*

*In all he does he is faithful and just;
all his commands are dependable.
They last for all time;
they were given in truth and righteousness.
He set his people free
and made an eternal covenant with them.
Holy and mighty is he!
The way to become wise is to honour the Lord;
he gives sound judgment to all who obey his commands.
He is to be praised forever.*

Now the reading in Mark's Gospel.

Mark has described how Jesus drew his team together, and now he tells us about the beginning of his active ministry. Jesus' first act is, in some respects, very traditional. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and teaches in the rabbinic tradition. Mark tells us nothing of what he said, but he does record the great impression he made on the congregation. Scribes often presented a range of opinions from earlier scholars, then left the congregations to make up their own minds. Jesus' teaching is clearly much more authoritative. It carries conviction and leaves people feeling that they had heard the 'word of the Lord'.

Bible Reading Mark 1: 21 - 28

Jesus drives out an impure spirit.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

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I remember going to the Methodist Conference in 1988. That year was held at Westminster Central Hall, London and during that time I took some time out to go and listen to the Methodist minister Donald Soper preaching from his soapbox in Hyde Park; around him crowds of people gathered; people from all walks of life, listening with focused attention on what he was saying. Some asking him questions and Donald answering them in his usual style. This kind of preaching is something of a lost art. In present-day society, information comes as soundbites or tweets. Authority is gauged by the number of likes a post attracts. But authority can be undermined rapidly by inconsistent behaviour or actions that are seen as hypocritical. The demand for consistency between words and actions takes us straight back to Jesus. Jesus, whose very words are powerful because they match his works. Because Jesus himself embodies authenticity, integrity and authority.

One day, a man and his friends came into a town called Capernaum. They decided to go to synagogue, Then the man at the front got up and began teaching the people. No one really knew who he was but it says they were astounded by his teaching. But that was all. They were just astounded. They liked it. It was nice. It was different from what they usually heard and it was a nice change, but nothing life changing. But that impression of authority and integrity may have stayed in people's minds and attracted them to listen to him again. And this asks each one of us to look into our minds and into our churches and ask ourselves 'Do our churches create a striking first impression?' We often talk in our Church Councils and other church meetings about how our churches look to the outsider. But this isn't just about the physical appearance, though in deed to some people that may matter. Rather, it's about the appearance of how visitors will get a sense of Jesus' presence, how they will get a sense of his authority, his passion for good, when they come into our churches?

On a cold January day in 2007, a man walked into a busy train station in Washington D.C. He opened up his violin case and began busking. Minutes went by and finally one man realized there was a musician playing, so he slowed down for a moment to listen then carried on. Later the violinist received his first dollar bill, tossed into his hat on the floor by a woman who never even looked in his direction. A man leaned casually against a wall to listen for a moment. Children would stop to listen, only to be quickly pulled away by their parents to keep a move on. The man played six pieces of music by Bach for about 45 minutes and during that time many hundreds of people walked by. Some stopped to listen. Some gave him money, totalling \$32. And when he stopped playing no one applauded, no one particularly noticed. But what no one knew was that the man playing was world-renowned violinist Joshua Bell. Joshua only three days earlier had played the same pieces of music for a sold-out concert where the cheapest tickets were \$100. But this day, standing in a train station in a t-shirt and baseball cap, playing on a violin that was worth \$3.5 million dollars, only seven people stopped to listen twenty-seven people gave him a little more than a dollar. The other 970 people didn't even notice him.

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This begs the question from each one of us: 'do we notice or recognize something beautiful if it is not in the place we expect it to be?' Could we notice a beautiful painting that should be hanging on a museum wall, but instead sits on the ground at a car boot sale? Could we recognize beautiful music if it wasn't on stage or coming through our iPods and radios?

In the gospel reading it says there is a commotion at the back of the synagogue. A man stood and was now mumbling something to himself as he stumbled up to the front. And what he was saying got louder and louder:

"I recognize you... I know who you are. You are the holy one of God", the unclean spirit shouts these words at Jesus, rejecting him and everything he stands for, in doing so. Mark's hearers gain a new way of understanding Jesus – he is the Holy One of God. What are the attributes of holiness? The story tells us that holiness and uncleanness cannot coexist, and that holiness drives out evil. We know that often evil seems to come out on top, and that the line between holiness and uncleanness can seem blurred and messy. But this story helps us see that, in Jesus Christ, it is possible to distinguish clearly between good and evil, right and wrong, and in so doing, there is hope that for us too, we truly have good life; a good life will be possible because we come to Christ.

Imagine for a moment there has been a traffic accident. It's dark, and someone has taken it into their own hands by directing traffic around. Some going one way, and some going completely around. But it's hard to distinguish the person directing traffic. How much difference then would it make if that person was wearing a hi-vis jacket? Are there other things that would make a difference in our lives – age, gender, disability? Do we attribute authority more readily to some people rather than to others? And yes, what do we see as authoritative? We have, and we get so many different views on things and we have become accustomed to President Trump speaking about fake news. So how can we tell what to make of it all?

Whether it's climate change, life-changing diets, or dealing with the economic fallout from the Covid pandemic, we are surrounded day by day by experts who speak authoritatively on their given subject. And this is often followed, especially in the news media, by another expert speaking authoritatively on the same subject – but with a completely different view! On social media, it is even worse; often you have no idea whether the person speaking authoritatively is an expert or not – but you can probably guarantee there will be a lot of people shouting at each other! This doesn't look like changing any time soon, but it can leave us longing for genuine authority. And this was why Jesus' teaching received the reaction that it did. He not only spoke with certainty and confidence, but he backed up his teaching with actions that confirmed his authenticity and authority. He really did hold power! An unclean spirit recognised this and he looked to heckle him, but was firmly rebuked and sent packing.

Jesus had come to teach in this synagogue and no one recognized him. No one knew who he was. No one really stopped to take in what he was saying. No one



except the man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. He was the only one who recognized Jesus. And immediately, Jesus speaks to the spirit, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" The unclean spirit released the stranglehold that it had on this man's life and he was free.

This story of Jesus healing the man of the unclean spirit comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. In fact, this is one of the first things that he is involved in. And in this story, he is recognised by no one except the evil spirit, which begs the question: will any of us recognise Jesus when he comes into our life? Or do we keep our heads down, avoiding eye contact and walking past God like so many walked past that famous violinist? It is a risky business to look for God in the world. But in looking for God in the world it is more likely expose something about ourselves and our lives. But Jesus knows that it is only when we expose ourselves, our lives, that we can do something about it. That indeed we can be truly healed, and come into a love presence of Christ.

Amen.

Hymn: For The Healing Of The Nations

*For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.*

*Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.*

*All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.*

*You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.*



And now our prayers of intercession, let's pray together:

Let us pray for the world:

for places of conflict, and times of war:

Christ hear us as we open ourselves to the world's needs

***Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.***

Let us pray for the world:

for places of hunger and poverty,

Christ, hear us as we open ourselves to the world's needs.

***Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.***

Let us pray for our world:

for places in our community, and for our neighbourhoods:

Christ, hear us as we open ourselves to the world's needs.

***Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.***

Let us pray for our world:

for our families and friends, those who are ill and recovering,

those anxious and afraid: and those who have lost loved ones:

Christ, hear us as we open ourselves to the world's needs.

***Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.***

We ask these, our prayers, in the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ
who listens and answers prayer.

Amen



Hymn: May The Mind Of Christ My Saviour

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.*

*May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.*

*May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting -
this is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.*

Almighty God,
be with us this week.
and we ask that you will meet with us each morning,
and in every situation throughout the day,
whoever we are with,
help us to draw on your strength and wisdom,
that we may be faithful and true
in following the example and pattern
given to us by Jesus.
Amen

And may the Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
The fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with each one of us today and for evermore.

Amen.

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King Of Glory, King Of Peace - George Herbert

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The Right Hand Of God - Patrick Eugene Prescod (alt.)

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