



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
THE GENERAL CONVENTION

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PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES

Sermon at Grace Church, Bakersfield, California  
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Mark 1:21-28  
Bonnie Anderson, President  
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Even in the times when Jesus walked the earth, people paid attention to authority. Our Gospel reading tells us that when Jesus taught he did so with authority. It was recognized. It was talked about. We are told that he amazed his disciples, and probably many others who were bystanders, when he commanded the unclean spirit out of the person in the synagogue. Jesus had authority. He did not try and convince people he had it. He just had it, by his very way of being, and people knew it.

Then and now, authority is valued. Most everyone wants it, whether consciously or not. Authority is one of those priceless commodities that you can't buy.

"I'll take a jumbo bag of authority, please". And if you sit around hoping to get some by osmosis, it will never happen. Authority exudes from the very pores of some people and never darkens the doorstep of others. It is one of those attributes that can be boldly and visibly proclaimed, as in an "outfit of authority" – badge, credentials that can be flashed, a swagger. Authority can be boldly proclaimed with papers of authority- a diploma or certificate. But those are a different kind of authority than what I am talking about.

I am talking about the Jesus-kind of authority. The Jesus kind of authority isn't a proud, chest-out kind of authority. There certainly is no swaggering in the Jesus kind of authority. The Jesus kind of authority comes from strength borne out of vulnerability. The Jesus kind of authority comes from relationship sometimes borne out of loneliness. It comes from community borne out of isolation. It comes from a depth of spirit. It comes from self knowledge. It comes from knowing Jesus and from holding him as close as our own breath. The Jesus kind of authority comes from knowing we belong to God.

When the disciples and others in the synagogue saw and heard Jesus, they knew they were witnessing something important and that they should pay attention. That's the kind of authority I'm talking about – it is hard to describe, but you know it when you see it.

But don't get too comfortable, because the authority given to us as followers of Jesus has some scary parts to it. The Jesus kind of authority can get us into trouble. When the "outfit and badge" kind of authority gets carried away and causes harm to people, the Jesus kind of authority has to stand up and speak up on behalf of others.

I think you find yourselves with a Jesus kind of authority. You have it because you have humility to balance your authority. You have authority because you know that you belong to Jesus. And through



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Jesus, you belong to each other. You have built a community, with God's help, of support and prayer and a sense of call to be in relationship with others outside your community. Like Jesus, always looking for the marginalized, the outcast, the ones who need help, because, like Jesus, you have been there yourselves.

Your authority has been seasoned by your hard times. You have "made lemonade" so to speak, a big batch of it.

What amazes me is that you have not gotten stuck in your own authority. It is so tempting to sit back and say, "great, now I don't have to do anything"....been there, done that. Instead, you are reaching out to other people. You have your eyes focused upon finding Jesus in other people and helping them.

Of course, the biggest temptation is to think that our authority and accomplishments belong to us. But we know that it is God who makes us authoritative. It God who works through us.

Everything comes from God. We belong to God. We are marked as Christ's own forever by our baptism. Our authority comes from God.

You have been to the well and found the spring of life.

So, let our voices ring with authority and praise for all that God gives us. Let us walk together in humility. Let us use the authority that God has given us by the death and resurrection of his son Jesus, to do God's work of love and reconciliation in a hurting world. Let us always serve each other and the stranger with humility and in the name of Jesus.

Amen.