

Brackenhurst 1 February 2009 (HC & Youth Leaders' dedication 09h30)
“Please hold, your call is important to us...”

Welcome

Call to Worship: Psalm 111

Hallelujah!

I will extol Yahweh with all my heart

in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

Great are the works of Yahweh;

they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Glorious and majestic are his deeds,

and his righteousness endures forever.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, as we gather in this assembly this morning, gathered to worship and praise you for your works and majesty, we come before you as people who are humbled by all that you have done for us, and all that you offer to us.

Help us, this morning, to give back to you through our worship

Help us to be focussed

Help us to be enthusiastic

And help us to be truly yours

That we may indeed be set free to worship you more fully.

For the sake of your Son, the once despised Jesus, whom even now we proclaim as King.

Amen

- Hymn 222 — Hail Thou Once Despised Jesus

Notices

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

- 09h30 Jesus put this Song

09h30: Youth Leaders' Dedication:

Preface — baptismal promise

Questions:

Friends, do you believe that you are called by God through the Church to work with young children and young people?

I do

Next questions are serious: think about what promising to; discuss — facebook...

Do you promise always, by word and deed, whether at work or home, school or leisure — or on facebook — to offer a Christian example?

With God's help, I will

Do you promise to pray for those in your care and to guide them in their journey of faith?

With God's help, I will

Will you be diligent in your preparation for and support of the ministry leaders?

With God's help I will

Prayer:

Loving God, we thank you for those who have responded to your call. We pray that the Holy Spirit may inspire them as they undertake this ministry in your name.

By their encouragement and example, may they enable others to discover new life in Christ

Amen.

- 09h30 Let the Flame burn Brighter
- Hymn 536 — O for a Heart to Praise my God

Offering

Prayer of Response and Preparation

Scripture:

Mark 1:21-28

- Hymn 745 — O Thou who Camest from Above

Message

INTRODUCTION

- We are fortunate in modern life to have many things that make our life much easier
 - like cell phones
 - microwave ovens
 - Internet!
 - * But one of the things that we are cursed with is lack of personal contact
- In the old days if you had a problem with your bank account it was easy to rectify

- You went to your branch
- you spoke to your bank manager
 - * Whom you probably knew, if not by name, at least by sight
- And you resolved the problem
 - Nowadays, nowadays you get the call centre
 - * Even if you go into your bank, they say here is a telephone, phone our call centre
 - Firstly, you've got to get through to the operator
 - * "Please hold, your call is important to us"
- Then you finally get through and you've got to explain your problem
 - Now if your problem is a common one, it is quick and easy to resolve
 - * The operator looks on his list:
 - * Problem 23 (b)
 - And he does the necessary, and you get off the phone thinking that it wasn't so bad after all
- But if you depart from the script things get hopeless
 - Firstly the operator doesn't understand what you're saying
 - * The words that you're speaking don't match the words on his list, so he can't make sense of it
- Next time a telesales person phones, ask them a random question and watch what happens
 - But after careful explanation finally you get him to admit that he doesn't know what to do and he escalates your call
 - * I think that means it gets put through to the person in the next cubicle who has worked there two weeks longer than what he has.
 - So he can't help you either
 - * And then you get put through to a supervisor
 - And then the supervisor says that he or she will phone you back
 - * By then you know you've lost the battle and it's easier just to forget the issue
- It's like the guy who, as sick as anything goes to the doctor, the doctor says go home, have a hot bath and then go and stand naked outside in the cold
 - He says, doctor if I do that I'll get pneumonia
 - * The Doctor says yes, pneumonia I can cure.
- When we have a problem we want someone who can help us, someone who has the authority to sort the problem out
 - Not someone who is going to pass us from pillar to post

- * And it is exactly this problem of authority, this problem of who we can trust, of who can help us, that is dealt with in our reading this morning
- Clearly, as we look at the passage, we see that the ordinary people of the day, like you and me, had a problem with the people who were supposed to be in authority
 - The teachers of the law who were supposed to be in charge apparently had no real authority
 - * Or perhaps claimed to have authority, but were unable to really help the people when they needed it
 - It seems as though everything was fine as long people operated within the parameters described by the law, but as soon as they stepped out of it, they didn't know what to do.
- And so this passage sets forth, right from the outset of the gospel, the authority that Jesus has
 - An authority to deal with things in a way that the teachers of the law could not.
 - * And so in the passage we find the people saying that in Jesus they have found someone who has an authority that their other religious leaders did not have
- A key point of this story is the contrast between the authority of Jesus and the authority of the religious leaders of the day
 - although there was probably less distinction between civic and political leaders and religious leaders then, than what there is today.
- As we approach the story you will recognise that it comes immediately after Jesus has announced that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and has called his first disciples
 - You will remember that Peter spoke about this a couple of weeks ago.
- And so Jesus has announced his kingdom and now he shows, through the healing of many, the possessed man and others — that indeed the kingdom has come and he has the authority to proclaim it
 - Not just in word, but in deed as well.
- This story calls us, I think, to recognise two things, and we need to see the story from these two perspectives
 - On the one hand the role that we have to live and operate with Christ's authority
 - * Do we truly act as Christ's emissaries to those around us
 - * Or do we behave like the teachers of the law
 - * who pretended to have all the authority,
 - * but really had none when people confronted them?

- And on the other in our own search for authority as people
 - * Who do we believe in?
 - * We do we put our trust?
 - * Do we rely on political and others leaders to resolve the problems that we see around us?
- I think that in order to keep our perspective on these two aspects of authority we need to bear these concepts in mind:
- So as we seek to understand true authority it is helpful to keep these two aspects in mind
 - I want to suggest this morning that in looking for authority we
 - * Annotate the Authority
 - * Acknowledge the Authority
 - * Accept the Authority

(1) Annotate the Authority

- Probably not the best word, but wanted something with an ‘a’!
 - But would probably be better to say ‘Name the authority’
 - * As in, under whose authority do you do this?
- When we speak about authority and whether people have authority or not
 - Whether we speak about the authority of Christ in our lives
 - Or when we speak about our authority under Christ
- We need to bear this in mind:
 - We need to know that we are operating under the authority of Christ
 - * And then, when we act under that authority, we are acting with authority
 - * We name the authority under which we operate
- We act under the authority of Jesus, the authority that is given to his disciples at the end of this same gospel: (Mark 16:17)

“These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well”

 - * I don’t think that we are to take these words literally — although there are people who play with snakes as part of their worship — rather they are words that indicate that the authority of Jesus is passed on to his followers
- But where did Jesus get his authority from?
 - Mark’s gospel is very simple

- He doesn't go into long descriptions of Jesus' birth and stories about shepherds and wise men
- He begins simply by naming the authority under which Jesus works by saying (1:1):
 - “The beginning of the gospel — the good news — about Jesus Christ, THE SON OF GOD.”
 - * This fact isn't up for debate
- The authority is given, it is there, because Jesus is the Son of God, and Mark goes on to prove that with the story of Jesus' baptism and the voice from heaven
 - A voice which says
 - “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”
- And it is out of this affirmation that Jesus is able to begin his announcement that the Kingdom of God is at hand
 - And to demonstrate that this isn't just something that he is saying but is a real truth, and he demonstrates that through his authority over the evil spirit that had possessed the man
 - * And after that his authority over illness, and fever, and the demon possessed.
- And then, very early the next morning he goes out to a solitary place where he prays
 - He gets his authority by knowing who he is
 - By knowing that he is the Son
 - * through his close relationship with the Father
- If we are to understand the authority of Jesus the first thing that we have to do is to name him as God
 - Not a prophet, not a holy man, not a great teacher
 - * But God
 - * To name Jesus as God, to name him as the source of our authority
- It is as simple as that, and that can make all the difference
 - The demon in the story quite clearly indicates that he knows the source of Jesus authority, he names it:
 - * It says: “I know who you are—you are the Holy One of God.”
- And if we are going to act with the authority of Jesus we need to know our place in his kingdom
 - We are not and cannot be teachers of the law running around trying to convince others of our power, we need to know our power.
- This is the difference:
- One evening many years ago, in Benoni, I watched two guys at a robot

- There was a big V8 Mercedes stopped at the lights
- And a Golf GTI pulled up next to him, checked him out, revved the motor a little
 - * and challenged the Merc to dice
- Well, you know what happened?
 - The lights changed, the golf revved and pulled off with tyres smoking, screaming off down the street
 - * And the driver of the merc gently put his foot down, the back of the car dropped and he left the golf standing.
- Now that's authority!
 - That's the difference between one who acts without authority and one who knows and understands the authority of God
 - * That's the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees
 - That's the difference between a Christian who truly knows Jesus, who knows that he or she is one of God's children with whom God is well pleased,
 - * and Christian who bases his life on a legalistic black and white interpretation of the law as the Pharisees did.

(2) Acknowledging the Authority

- My second point is similar to my first, but there is a subtle difference.
 - Firstly I spoke about naming the authority
- Now I want to speak about Acknowledging the Authority
 - One of the first things that they teach you when you start doing assignments at schools, but particularly in tertiary education, is to acknowledge your sources
 - You can use as many sources as you like, but you have to acknowledge them
 - * Using footnotes in your text
 - * And having a complete bibliography in the back of your assignment
- You have to acknowledge where you're quoting from, and by doing so you're really saying:

"I'm naming — and appealing — to the recognised authority of the author in this field to make my point".

I myself don't have the authority to make such an audacious statement, but John Macquarrie does because he has a Doctorate of Divinity from Oxford University

 - * together with a whole host of other degrees and academic appointments
- So I can rely on his authority

- You are issued a driver's licence under the authority of the Dept of transport, or whatever they're called these days
 - You can name them
 - * But you may not necessarily acknowledge their authority over how you obey the rules of the road.
 - * "They're all a bunch of idiots, they don't know what they speaking about" 60km vs 80km
 - That's the difference.
- Do you remember the story of Jesus saying that even the devil believes?
 - see, the devil believes, and knows the authority of Jesus, can name Jesus as the source of authority
 - * But the devil doesn't acknowledge the authority of Jesus
- Naming the authority is like saying I know Jesus is king of the world
 - Acknowledging the authority is saying I gladly bow the knee,
 - * that is the difference.
- Again, in the actions of Jesus we see how he acknowledged the authority of his Father
 - He didn't just say God is my Father
 - * But he acknowledged that authority by obeying him
 - * by spending time with him
- I think that is where the Pharisees went wrong
 - They had stopped acknowledging God,
- The knew him, they were able to name him as the source life, the source of the Law and every blessing
 - But they stopped acknowledging him and instead allowed the law to become God
- The Law was easy — they knew it back to front, they knew how it applied, they knew how it could give them authority
 - So this is what they based their authority on.
 - * the Law says, the script says
- And when the Law didn't say, instead of defaulting to a God of love, they became all self-righteous
 - Instead of acknowledging God as the authority, they took an authority upon themselves
 - * I think that we need to be careful of that
 - Whether we speak about the authority of Christ in our lives
 - Or when we speak about our authority under Christ

- Sometimes it is so much easier to base our authority on “the Bible says” rather than what Jesus says.
 - We name Jesus, who is God, as our authority
- But we don’t live in close relationship with God so we don’t acknowledge God
 - And default instead to a rigid legalism that instead of setting people free binds them even more tightly
 - We mistake rigid legalism for authority
 - * And that hurts people, us and others

(3) Accepting the Authority

- So, now whether we’re speaking of the authority of Christ in our lives, or over our lives
 - The ability of Christ to heal us and set us free
- Or whether we speak about the authority that we have under Jesus Christ
 - The ability to share with others what Christ has done for us
- We recognise that firstly we have to name God and Jesus as the source of authority
 - Secondly we have to acknowledge the authority
 - * that the name does indeed carry power and authority
 - Then thirdly, we need to accept that authority
 - * We need to give the authority which we have named and acknowledged a place in our lives
- To go back to my driver’s licence illustration
 - We name the source of our authority to drive as the department of transport
 - We acknowledge that they have the authority to pull us over and stop us if we’re behaving badly on the road
 - * And then we accept that authority by choosing not to behave badly, by choosing to obey even though some of the applications of the rules seem stupid, like 60km where it should be 80.
- I think this is something that Jesus got right that we struggle with
 - Jesus was so easily able to accept his Father’s authority in everything and that’s probably why he was able to teach with authority
- He didn’t have to worry about whether he had the authority to do these things or not
 - Because he knew and accepted that the Father did, and he was simply acting in the Father’s name.
- If we are to be effective ourselves as Christ followers, then we ourselves need to accept the authority we have in Jesus

- And cultivate the kind of relationship which is based on real relationship rather than regulation
- Not a relationship in which we are constantly referring back to scripture
 - * What does the Bible say about this?
 - * What does the Bible say about that?
 - * Can we? can't we
 - * And what happens when it's not in the script
- That's the worst kind of Christian to be because it brings us no joy and no freedom to live
 - And it certainly brings no joy to those around us
 - * Especially those we are trying to convert
- We end up simply like the zealous Pharisees who want everyone to operate according to a fixed set of rules and principles without deviating from the script
 - A set of rules and principles that drains all life from us
- Jesus; God is the life-giver and naming, acknowledging and acting that truth out, that authority, gives us the freedom to be human
 - To be the people God created us to be
 - * And to allow others to be the people God created them to be
- Even when they don't live according to the script

CONCLUSION

- As I close off I want to draw your attention to the difference between the authority of Jesus and authority of the teachers of the law
 - The key difference!
- Jesus' authority set people free
 - He freed people who were bound by the evil spirits, and illness
 - He set them free to be who they were created to be
- The authority of the teachers of the law bound people up
 - Instead of setting them free they becomes so constrained in what they could do and could not do
 - * Where they could go, what they could eat
 - * What was clean, what was unclean
 - * That they became truly bound
 - The authority of Jesus was to set free, of the Pharisees was to keep bound up
- To close off with, then
 - Does our understanding of the authority of God set us free, or does it bind us?
 - Does our understanding of the authority of God set people free, or does it seek to bind and capture them

- I pray that as you reflect on these things that you will come to a greater understanding of the authority of Jesus
 - Both in your life and others.
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

- Hymn 244 — Sing we the King

Benediction

Doxology