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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Epiphany 4

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, this morning's gospel reading gives us an insight into the teaching prowess of Jesus Christ our Lord.

And that may sound strange to our ears.

It may sound strange to use a word like "prowess" to describe Jesus' teaching.

I mean, would a high school student describe their math teacher's, or their English teacher's, or their science teacher's teaching ability using such a word?

Would a high school student say, "My teacher's teaching prowess is unmatched"?

Probably not.

Would a college student describe their professor's teaching ability using a such a word?

Would they say, "My professor's prowess at teaching is amazing"?

Again, probably not.

A high school student or a college student might say that their teacher or professor has a certain mastery of the subject.

A high school student or a college student might say that their teacher or professor has a certain expertise when it comes to teaching.

But it is probably unlikely that a high school student or a college student would use "prowess" with respect to the teaching ability of their teacher or professor.

Why? Because "prowess" is a sort of archaic word for one thing.

It is not nearly used as much as it once was.

And second, the word "prowess" denotes a sense of effectiveness.

We might speak of the prowess of a fisherman or fisherwoman, that is, the fisherman or fisherwoman is EFFECTIVE at catching fish.

We might speak of the prowess of an athlete, that is, the athlete is effective at defeating their opponents.

Prowess means skill, mastery, expertise, AND effectiveness.

And so when we speak of prowess with respect to teaching, that sounds a little unusual to our ears.

After all what does it mean to be an effective teacher?

It is sometimes difficult to see the results of an effective teacher.

A teacher may not see the results in their students say for some time, if even ever.

A student can get all A's on tests but does that teaching translate into transformation of the student in the long run.

This is not in any way to say teaching is unimportant, or not highly valuable.

To the contrary.

But this is only that there are many more intangibles associated with teaching than say with other vocations.

So what does it mean then to speak of the teaching prowess of Jesus Christ?

What does it mean to suggest that Jesus' teaching is a step above the teaching of other would-be teachers?

PAUSE

In short, it means that Jesus' teaching is highly effective.

And this is what the people noticed when Jesus entered that synagogue in Capernaum long, long ago.

They noticed Jesus' teaching with authority.

They noticed Jesus' teaching with prowess.

They noticed Jesus' teaching had the ability to accomplish what it said.

In short, Jesus' teaching was effective in the moment.

PAUSE

When Jesus is in the synagogue, there is a man there who was overcome with an unclean spirit, or demon.

And this man suddenly cries out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God?”

This spirit has overcome this man, and is in effect also trying to overcome Jesus.

To know another person, to know their name, and who they are, was in effect to gain power over another person.

So, we might see this exchange as the demon’s attempt to gain power over Jesus.

But, Jesus will have none of it.

Jesus rebukes the demon, commanding the demon, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him.”

And the demon suddenly convulsed the man and came out of him.

The demon convulsed the man and came out of him.

And that, AND THAT... sisters and brothers in Christ, is prowess.

That is effectiveness.

That is teaching with authority.

To speak words and to have those words accomplish what they say, is a new kind of teaching.

But it shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus’ words have power to do what they say.

Because he is after all the Word made Flesh.

Jesus is the same Word that spoke creation into being.

Jesus is the same Word that the prophets declared, and which came to fruition.

Jesus is the same Word of the Old Testament, only now, that Word has taken on bone and sinew.

Only now that Word walks the earth in a person Jesus Christ.

PAUSE

So yes, Jesus’ teaching has authority.

Jesus’ words are going to accomplish what they say.

They are going to change water into wine.

They are going to multiply loaves and fish.

They are going to heal a blind man.

They are going to raise up Lazarus.

They are going to accomplish all sorts of astounding feats.

And, yes, they are going to be able to rid a man of an unclean spirit.

Jesus' teaching is effective, like no other teacher.

Oh, don't get me wrong.

We hear others speak and teach with authority.

Scientists and officials update us with respect to the coronavirus.

And they speak with authority.

Weathermen and women tell us of impending storms and dire weather.

And they speak with authority.

Otherwise, we wouldn't listen to them.

But these persons can't command a virus to go away, nor command the weather to be still.

Jesus on the other hand speaks a command and what he says is what happens.

"Be silent, and come out of him."

And the demon convulsed the man and came out of him.

So, yes, Jesus' teaching is different. It is profoundly effective.

PAUSE

But sisters and brothers in Christ, what does this mean for us today?

What impact does this have on our life?

In other words, so what?

So what if Jesus' teaching prowess is such that what he says happens?

After all we are talking about a very long time ago.

We are talking about a very long time ago when Jesus was teaching.

So how is Jesus still teaching with authority today?

IS Jesus still teaching with authority today?

And if so, where, how?

To which I say, the teaching authority of Jesus is found in the church.

The Spirit of Christ, that same Spirit that resided in Jesus when he walked the earth...

That same Spirit that resided in Jesus when he taught those around him...

That same Spirit of Christ abides now in the church, and is still speaking and teaching with authority.

Even when we can't gather in-person as the church, Christ is still teaching his church with authority, through the internet.

I remind us that Martin Luther once called the church a Mundhaus.

That was the tagline for the Church, according to Luther.

The Church was a Mundhaus.

Translation: The Church is a Mouthhouse.

The Church is the place where we hear Jesus teaching.

And it is in the hearing of the Word even over the internet, where we come to experience the teaching prowess of Christ.

Indeed, the teaching authority of Jesus is evident in the fact that Jesus's Word is effective to form the the church, to gather people together to hear the Word of God.

And what is Jesus saying?

What is the teaching that comes from our Lord?

It is the same as that of long ago, only the context has changed.

The world has changed, but the teaching of Jesus has not.

The Word commands us to love our enemies.

The Word commands us to forgive one another.

The Word commands us to be merciful, to be generous, to be grace-filled.

The Word commands us to be joyful, to be hopeful, to be righteous, that is, to do the right thing.

This is the teaching of Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of our Lord.

And it is effective otherwise the Church would have ceased to exist long ago.

The teaching has authority otherwise the Christian community would have disbanded eons ago.

Faithful people still heed the word of God.

You and I still listen to the teaching of our Lord.

And we strive to live our lives according.

We are not always perfect in our efforts.

We do not always follow Christ's teaching to a tee.

Which is why we confess our sins.

But even so, we continue to come to the place where we can hear Jesus teaching us.

We continue to come to the gathering that is the church.

We continue to come to the Mundhaus so that we can hear the teaching prowess of Christ.

And if we listen, and if we allow Christ's Word to empower us, well then Christ's Word becomes effective.

Christ's teaching then does what it says it does, because it does what it says it does in us.

The Church, taught by the Spirit of Christ, is the power of the Word effective in the world today.

Here we find the teaching prowess of Christ.

Like a synagogue long ago, where a man was transformed because of Christ's teaching, so today, in the Church, we are transformed by Christ's teaching.

We are the men and women whom Christ is speaking to today.

And, now that Christ has taught us, we can't help but be living embodiments of Christ's teaching.

We can't help but be people who show love, and forgiveness, and mercy, and grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.