

Sermon - 01-31-21  
Ps 111; Dt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 8:1-13; Mk 1:21-28  
New Teaching – with Authority

The World Is Too Much with Us

By William Wordsworth

*“The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”*  
([poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org))

I believe Wordsworth expresses our heartache over the urban and suburban monstrosity we have built. What the poet calls “the world” has pulled away from our very source of breath and vitality. Worldly philosophers and the wise stop short of acknowledging that we are part of a spiritual reality. That sense of true belonging comes to us through communing with our God and the natural world God created, and with one another. Have modern human beings cut off their nose to spite their face? Do we refuse to recognize that we are part of a wonderful creation? We are part of everything we see, aren't we? You are a created being, you are God-breathed. Made in His image – and remade, reborn in Jesus Christ. That is the new teaching – the good news.

Jesus prayed: (Father), “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.” (Jn 17:14-15 NASB)

Staying out of the influence of the evil one requires that we develop our discernment. Otherwise, we walk naively into the traps that Satan can and will set for us. Jesus speaks with authority and evil influence must be gone at His word. This is what people called a “new teaching,” in our Gospel passage.

Later on, the Apostle Paul writes to the churches of Corinth. It seems to me the leaders there have peppered him with questions about Christian living – values, personal conduct and so on. So, in these 1 Corinthians passages we have been reading these past weeks, Paul gives answers about marriage, where and what to eat, plus other life-style notes for these people who have grown up pagan – and now realize they are children of God. Jesus raises the bar on how we conduct ourselves – we are living *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. Chatting with a Jesus-follower this past week, I got to hear that he works in a setting where you hear coarse and vulgar comments and jokes. My friend has, after some years working there, established his reputation. He is a person who will stop you if you use profanity. He simply says, “That language makes me uncomfortable.” He doesn't correct anybody – or try to shame them for their bad talk. It is known around the company that he will leave the room when an off-color joke is being told.

We have no authority in these matters, but Jesus has all authority over what the Gospel calls “unclean spirits.” Times have changed. We don't call mental health issues and illness “unclean spirits” any longer, but the Lord Jesus still has authority over these spiritual forces. We call these things disease or mental illness. Jesus is the great healer. The authority He had over these spirits was the sign of his anointing by God. The crowd saw – in the synagogue scene from Mark's Gospel – Jesus was able to remove these unclean spirits from the man.

The psalm we read today declares that God: “...has shown His people the power of His works, in giving them the **heritage of the nations**...Holy and awesome is His name.” (Ps 111:6, 9)

What is this heritage? What is our true national identity? Ask yourself, “Is the shaping force of our culture military might? Or is our brand, our hallmark, our heritage Christian and democratic ideals?” (*Heritage and Identity, FM Fladmark ed.*)

(Continued on next page.)

One of the learnings we took from Jonah, last week (Jonah, the reluctant prophet) was that God is deeply pleased by our repentance. God is deeply displeased by pride and hard-heartedness.

Can we repent for our nation – for our group or those we know and care about?

And what can you do about the way things are going? You may feel powerless. But the question before us is not our authority – our clout down at the court house or the state house.

Our learning in this Season after Epiphany – the season of the Light of the world – is that we live and move and have our being in Jesus Christ. We are Christ-bearers to the world around us. Jesus' authority and glory come to others by our actions and by our words. No pressure, right? This is our task in this world of woe.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

*I say this to explain to you how I know about these things. In olden times God did not share this plan with his people, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his apostles and prophets. And this is the secret: that the Gentiles will have their full share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's sons; both are invited to belong to his Church, and all of God's promises of mighty blessings through Christ apply to them both when they accept the Good News about Christ and what he has done for them. (Eph 3:4-6 TLB)*

The new teaching of Jesus is in fact the revealing of what God had planned all along. What is new is the coming of God in the flesh to live among us and to bear the penalty for our sin. Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Let Jesus speak with authority in your life – your circumstances. He makes all things new. Then, you are a living example of God's promises. Then, you fulfill the plan He had for you all along.

Amen.