Sermon for Sunday, January 28, 2018

Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy 18: 15-22

Mark 1: 21-28

I Corinthians 7: 32-35; 8: 1-3

Sermon Title: “Broken!”

# Sermon Topic: Use of authority

Sermon Purpose: To teach people not to abuse their authority in their various forms of ministry because we are all alike in so many ways that no one has true authority over anyone else.

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Sermon Prayer: Lord, as we study Your Word and apply it to our lives, guide us by Your Spirit, we pray. Amen.

I’m about to do something, this morning, that I have never done in my entire ministry. (Begin to take off robe, cross, tab, and any other outer garment. Sit on stool and talk to the congregation.)

Who, in this room, thinks he/she is perfect? [Wait for any response.] {If now response, ask individuals. If there is a smart aleck in the group, respond with “I’ll pray for you because I pity you.”}

When people come to talk with me as a pastor, or as a counselor, I hope it’s not because they think I’m under the impression that I’m perfect, or that I have my “shtuff” together. That’s the wrong person to go to for advice! Someone who thinks he/she is perfect usually has an attitude that prevents someone from being comfortable enough with that person to ask for help.

If you talk to my wife, or to anyone else in my family, they’ll tell you - without hesitation - that I’m **not** perfect!

I grew up in a home with an alcoholic father who had a mean streak seven miles long. Consequently, my mother was always stressed and (cranky). I spent a lot of my time having to “make things work out.” Did I love my father? Yes. Did I hate my father? Yes. Do I love my mother? Yes. Do I miss my “childhood?” No! I was glad to get out of it.

When I was able to go to work, I did. I mowed lawns until I was able to get my working papers. Then, I worked in a dry cleaner, a pizza shop, and a veterinary hospital – all at the same time, while going to high school. I still mowed lawns and took care of things around the house: putting up Christmas decorations and lights, and stayed active in 3 church choirs. (Can anyone spell “workaholic”?)

College saw the same pattern: school and work – only **then** I worked at a Royal Crown Cola bottling plant where my father worked. He was the bottler and I loaded trucks and drove a van for local deliveries. Oh, and I kept the job at the veterinary hospital.

Then, I taught seventh grade remedial reading, English, introductory Spanish, and one class of remedial math for a year.

After that came seminary and classes, work at the switchboard, in the mailroom, and being responsible for guided tours of the campus – all while serving three successive churches in field education positions: much like we’ve had here at LPC with Kirk Ruehl, Janet Vane Pederson, Jane Price, and Dr. Ingrid Singh (for those of you who remember our former seminary students.)

A few months before seminary graduation, I was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer. I battled that with surgery and the chemotherapy follow-up. Obviously, I survived, and went on to serve my previous congregation where Suzan and I met, fell in love, and married.

Four years later, we moved to Linden, and I became the pastor of LPC. Janelle was born (and two years later PJ was born), and we have been here ever since. Since then, I’ve had triple cardiac bypass and have developed diabetes, which I am managing.

Why am I telling you this? It’s not because I have this illusion that I’m the perfect person who can handle anything. I’m not! It’s to let you know that I’m just as “broken” as anyone else.

I’ve endured some “shtuff”. I’ve come through some difficulties. With God’s help, I’ve overcome some stuff. But I’m still **broken**!

I’m just as broken as anyone else that serves this congregation. I’m absolutely positive that not one of our elders or deacons who has ever served this congregation has been perfect. Each of us has issues and problems. But each of us has learned to rely on one another and to share what we’ve learned **through** our experiences. Each of us has also found that we **have** to rely on God’s guidance through the Holy Spirit in order to be **able** to lead!

Our role as a church is to be able to share our journey with one another. We need to be able to sit down with one another and just be ourselves – with all of our imperfections, and share the ways God has brought us through life’s trials. As we have said over the years, we need to open ourselves to one another. And we need to **be** open to people who may not look like us, or have the same spiritual **history** as we do, or may come with different **baggage** than what we’ve carried.

We may need to open our minds to look at different ways of doing things that will meet the needs and address the spiritual questions of people who are trying to find out how the Bible speaks to their lives. After all, that’s what Jesus and the Apostle Paul did! They didn’t stay in the synagogue and expect people to bring their questions to the Jewish worship services. They met with people in their homes and in the streets, while they were fishing or even collecting taxes.

When Jesus taught, there **were** those who questioned His authority. When the Scriptures say, "He taught as one with authority, and not as the scribes...,” we can well imagine the questions that arose concerning His right, reason, and power (or ability) to do so. We can hear the **outcry** of the scribes and the Pharisees. They may not have used our modern vernacular, but they certainly asked "by what authority" Jesus was ministering to the needs of the people - not only by reading and interpreting Scripture, but also by healing, casting out demons, and the methods by which He and His disciples observed the Holy days.

On two occasions, in this morning's Gospel Lesson, the people spoke of Jesus with a sense of awe, because they perceived that He had **some** kind of "authority.” In both of these cases, and in all other cases, we see that Jesus used His authority for the good of others rather than for feeding his ego; His was the authority that dispelled both ignorance and evil.

But notice, Jesus did not **abuse** that authority. When we remember the accounts of the temptations, we also remember how He **shunned** them. He used that authority **only** to help others - and to show God's love: in casting out demons, by healing the sick, as He restored the withered limbs of the crippled, by raising the dead - teaching what the heavenly Father **demands**, **expects**, and will **accept** as appropriate behavior **befitting** His creations: His **children**.

Now, the voice of guidance - and of warning - comes to **us**. As Christ's disciples, we must be careful of the way we use **our** authority: whether as leaders of the congregation - in whatever capacity - or as those who hold no office, but teach by example.

We must examine **what** we do, **why** we do it, and **how** it needs to be done; in order to be sure that God's Word and His love is faithfully shown - as we witness to salvation through Jesus Christ. **Whatever** we do, we **must** do it with the thought of helping others to understand the nature of God, through the ministry and message of Jesus Christ.

Are we in danger of being asked, "Who gave **you** the authority”? Probably, if we do our job right.

Let us pray: Father in heaven; we come in the strength of our faith and in the weakness of our physical beings. Guide us, we pray, by Your Spirit; that all we do, or say, or illustrate by example be faithful witness to Your love through Jesus Christ. It is truly in His name that we pray. Amen.