Last week if you remember, we read a parable about a group of unhappy workers who received the same wages from their master, for the unequal amount of works. The workers didn’t feel that they were treated fairly and adamantly voiced their complaints to the master. The response that they got from their master, however, was NOT what exactly they were looking for. After all, it was the master’s money, right? So technically he could do whatever he wants.

The seemingly “unfair” master had done nothing wrong. He had kept his promise and held up his end of the bargain. It was totally within his right to be generous to some, or not at ALL to his workers. **Ultimately the master exercised his authority of what he does, with what belongs to him.** As the old saying goes, there are two sides in every coin. We could analyze this parable from another point-of-view. Let’s not just focus on the unfair wages paid by the master, but what about the workers’ reluctance to accept the sovereignty and the authority of the master. Perhaps it was the workers who needed to be reminded of who was in charge and who has the ultimate authority here. It certainly was not an easy task for someone to exercise authority with integrity while exhibiting humility and respect to all of the subordinates.

The subject of authority came up pretty often throughout the Bible. Right off the back from the Creation story in *Genesis*, God made sure to Adam and Eve of who was in charge here and who had the supreme authority. Throughout Jesus’s teaching, we also see many references of the Master/Servant, Father/Son, Husband/Wife relationship, just to name a few. There’s always someone who’s the authoritative figure. Inevitably someone needs to step up and assume the responsibilities of being the leader. He or she must take ownership, make critical decision on behalf of the group, while putting others before himself or herself. The subordinates, however, must also respect his/her authority and leadership style and decisions. **Authority and humility must go hand-in-hand….or else it would just become a form of dictatorship.**

Jesus’s ultimate mission here on earth was to reclaim the once lost relationship between God and humanity. Throughout his teachings, Jesus repeatedly reminded the people that God remains a sovereign and faithful God through all generations and to all people, first the Jews then the Gentiles. It was God who exercises authority over His people, yet God did it through humility and grace, as demonstrated through Jesus’s ministry and character.

**Although the Old Testament God may seem to be more heavy-handed, whereas the New Testament God seemed kinder and gentler, nevertheless God is still the same God through all eternity and expects full obedience and allegiance from the people.** As the Psalmist declared, all heaven and earth shall declare God’s glory[[1]](#footnote-1) and let everything that has breath praise the LORD.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, the authority that Jesus was trying to re-establish was of a different kind of authority. It was authority based on one’s humility, not through some military forces or coercion. **How can someone be demonstrating authority and humility at the same time?**

A person with authority is often called upon to stand out and be an advocate on certain issues….someone who’s not only willing to take the praises and credits for the group but also accept their responsibilities, criticisms and take blames for the team as well. We have political leaders, religious leaders, or even athletes whom millions look upon for leadership. It is NOT easy to remain humble when you are in the spot-light and under the microscope. It takes a great deal of self-disciplines to put aside one’s ego and to place the needs of others before himself or herself.

In our gospel today, Jesus was having a run-in with the religious authority…. those who were in charge of the temple at the time, holding on to power, calling the shots, making all the important decisions. It is, however, important for us to note the context of our passage. You see, by that time, Jesus had just entered into Jerusalem on his way to his final pilgrimage journey.

In the chapter right before this, he had dropped a hint to his disciples about the purpose of his mission was for going into Jerusalem. *The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the 3rd day, he will be raised to life!”[[3]](#footnote-3)* This was all part of God’s plan.

Jesus came into Jerusalem on a mission with one purpose on his mind - to reclaim God’s authority. This by no means his own personal mission, but he was on a mission for his Father. None of the teachings, the miracles, healing the sick, casting out the demons, and forgiving of sinners would’ve mattered, if God’s name and glory were not proclaimed. **Jesus wanted to make sure that he was doing all of this not by his own authority but by God’s authority.**

As expected, Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem raised the nervousness and anxiety levels of those religious leaders. These religious leaders were afraid that Jesus would cause an uprising while overturning the authority of the synagogue. Those leaders realized that Jesus presented a threat to their power and authority. They looked for ways to trap him into making false accusation and claim for the crime of blasphemy, which was a crime punishable by death. “*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority”* they asked.

Upon entering into Jerusalem, Jesus went straight to the temple….not to pray but to do a little house-cleaning business to take care of. This was the final leg of his “mission” trip. Jesus stormed the temple, turned over the money exchange tables, and accused the religious authority of scandal while declaring this place a *“den of robbers.”[[4]](#footnote-4)* He publically humiliated the religious authority while standing up for his right. Jesus knew this was going to be confrontational. His ultimate motivation was to restore God’s authority and deliver it out of the hands of those who manipulated the powerless and spiritually deprived.

Some of us know all too well about authorities, whether it’s civic or religious authorities. We all have to pay our taxes, (we hope!) no one is exempt. We all must obey civil laws and regulations. We must stop at the RED light and obey the speed limits as posted. At work, we must be obedient to our supervisors, our managers, our principals, and our superintendent. We respect their office and their authority, while trusting that God is ultimately in control and not those who are in power.

Even in our faith, we keep ourselves in check with the commands and teachings that God has set before us. **Love God and love others, as we love ourselves! This was all part of God’s covenant to us.** Many of those religious authorities knew that this Jesus would exposed their own self-serving gains and interests. They wanted to keep the power within their grasp. They were more concerned about keeping in control rather than feeding and nurturing the spiritual soul of the people. Jesus proclaimed that his ultimate purpose was to do God’s will. None of what he was about to do would matter, if God’s wills were not proclaimed and honored. *Even the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of these religious authority leaders.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

As the Apostle Paul encouraged us through his letter to the early Church in Philippi, that we must not stand up for our faith all alone. The Spirit goes alongside with us whenever we are put under shame or are subjected to various trails and challenges. **It was God who grants us the boldness and courage to speak on God’s behalf while exercising the humility and grace to bear the cause of others.**

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we share the same mind with Christ, as Christ was to the Father. ***It is God who is at work in us enabling us both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.[[6]](#footnote-6)***It is by God’s authority that God’s name is highly exalted and that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Our lessons today prompt our actions to live up to our words and what we believe in. Jesus challenges us all to reclaim God’s ultimate authority with humility and grace.** Through his humility, Christ has set an example for all of us to emulate. **We shall seize the moment that God has allocated to us and be as Christ’s ambassadors**. By what authority do we stand to proclaim? By God’s authority which was vested in all of us. In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Psalm 19:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Psalm 150:6* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 20:18-19* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 21:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Matthew 21:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Philippians 2:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Philippians 2:9-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)