

**“Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”
(Luke 20:2)**

In one of my former churches, I had better not say which one, a member who became one of my great critics

- introduced himself like this, ‘I was property steward here for forty years’
- only providence prevented me from replying, ‘I wondered who was to blame?’
- in another congregation I asked our mild mannered church secretary
- ‘is he always like that?’ ‘Oh yes!’ she replied, ‘he thinks he runs the place’ - in truth he probably did
- On another time, I was out for the evening, at an event that was nothing to do with my work or church
- One of the men asked what I did for work and when I told him said to me
- ‘I work with a chap who runs one of your churches’ - little did he know how right he was
- Three rather sad illustrations from my ministry showing that to this day
- One of the most important questions in church is ‘who is running it?’ – it is all to do with authority

As Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news

- the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him
- “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”
- Before he would answer, Jesus asked them to declare where they stood on the ministry of John the Baptist
- The one who was his forerunner, proclaiming that Jesus was the promised Messiah
- Their lives were full of critical questions, but no answers
- As Jesus was teaching and proclaiming the gospel in the temple, only a matter of days before his death
- For the big question always concerns the identity and authority of Jesus

The 'Triumphal Entry' or 'Palm Sunday story' is an important part of the three synoptic Gospels,

- Matthew, Mark and Luke being so-called because they record a synopsis or summary
- The Triumphal Entry in these synoptic Gospels is followed by Jesus' ministry in the Temple
- in actual fact Luke makes very little of the entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)
- but is very interested that Jesus arrives at the Temple

Jerusalem's temple was one of the great sights of the ancient world, built of white marble overlaid with gold

- The first temple (often called Solomon's temple, though it was King David's project) lasted 400 years
- Until it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (nearly 600 years before Jesus was born)
- About half a century later, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed exiled Jews to return to rebuild the Temple
- Inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the Second Temple was built
- But during the oppression under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), the Temple was defiled
- By an image of the Greek god Zeus being set in the Holy of Holies
- And only in the time Judas Maccabaeus (161 BC) was the Temple recaptured and restored
- In 20 BC, in the reign of King Herod the Great, work began on a great project to enhance the Temple
- Which was not completed until AD 64, only six years before it was completely destroyed by the Romans

The Temple represented God's dwelling place among his people, symbolised in the cloud of Shekinah glory

- No wonder the boy Jesus referred to the Temple as 'my Father's house'
- the very presence of God in the Temple in Jesus is highly significant
- and his arrival at the temple as priest and king sets the scene for the passion narrative
- as Jesus made himself at home in the Temple, teaching and proclaiming the good news
- once again the issue of his identity and authority arises and it is an issue for us too as we think of:

I HIS AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

Jesus had come to the temple at Jerusalem and at the Temple the presence of God was sought and celebrated

- today the Temple is not a building but the church
- in the wider community I meet a great variety of people and some of them ask, ‘where is your church?’
- I know that by this question they mean where is the ‘church building’
- Interestingly enough, causing some confusion, in Cornwall if someone asked ‘where is the church?’
- They meant, where is the Church of England Parish Church? – the Methodists had a ‘chapel’
- In my first circuit, the church at Mitcham had been destroyed by enemy action in 1941. The next day
- there was a picture of the minister in the rubble, ‘the building’s gone but the church lives on’
- but from now on I am using ‘church’ to mean Christian community and not religious building

We are the church and we must ask ourselves, who do we say Jesus is and what authority does he have?

- When I arrived in Barry my main church had a huge notice-board outside saying ‘welcome to our church’
- Whatever possessed them to put that outside? My colleague suggested we amend it to ‘your church’
- that certainly sounded more friendly; the problem was when I arrived – it was ‘our church’
- New people came, and went, but didn’t really stick but no one understood why, but as a newcomer
- I understood perfectly why a young family would not want to stay there, and I set about changing it
- it is not my church, not our church, not your church, but his church, not a building but a people
- not an exclusive club where what happens pleases us, but a welcoming community that pleases him
- we should be a community, accountable to one another in fellowship, and accountable to Christ our Lord
- who is Jesus in our community – Son of God, Lord and Saviour? And is all authority his?

II HIS AUTHORITY IN THE WORLD

The ministry of Jesus was to proclaim the Kingdom of God and we are called to be kingdom people in the world

- a necessary part of that is to proclaim the identity and authority of Jesus
- on the radio, I heard one of a panel of so-called experts say that Jesus never said he was the Son of God
- it was both true and terribly, one might even say ‘deliberately’, misleading
- the Gospels nowhere record Jesus as saying, ‘I am the Son of God’ but Luke records Jesus’ trial
- where the council of elders, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, asked Jesus
- “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am” (Luke 22:70).
- Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips” (Luke 22:71)

Jesus told a parable, and this parable like so many others was a parable of the kingdom

- It evokes the Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7) and tends a little more to allegory than most parables
- A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away
- When he sent a servant they beat him and sent him away empty-handed
- Another servant they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed.
- A third, they wounded and then they threw him out and when the master sent his son, they killed him
- There is no doubt that there is an allusion to Jesus as the beloved son – the son who will be murdered
- Here is a parable that clearly affirms the identity and authority of Jesus
- God is building his people, a temple of living stones – and that people will meet opposition
- the people said ‘May this never be!’ but the leaders carry on their hostile scheming against Jesus
- in the wider world, who do people say Jesus is and what authority do they give him

III HIS AUTHORITY IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS

It was German theologian, pastor and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said

- The Church is the Church only when it exists for others ... not dominating, but helping and serving
- It's easy for us to say that the church needs to speak more plainly to the world
- we, at least I do, think of people in positions of high authority and I am disappointed
- not only sometimes by what they say; but often by what they do not say
- But the only privilege they have is to be heard by more people
- For if we are Christians then we are all speaking for the church (the people of the Kingdom of God)
- And if we are speaking for the church then we are speaking for Christ
- And if we are speaking for Christ then we had better be tuned into what he says
- And if we are to do that then we will need to read our Bibles
- And we will need to gather together in worship for that is how Christ speaks
- And we will have to listen and discern his word and will
- And we will have to live and work and speak for kingdom values and principles

We cannot avoid facing up to the fact that the world and the church are made up of individuals

- this puts the whole issue into context - what do you say about the identity of Jesus?
- Who do you say that he is and consequently what authority do you give him
- Those who did not believe him, rejected him, his teaching and preaching by nailing him to the cross
- Those who believed him, received him, his teaching and preaching
- and to them he gave the right to become children of God

As Jesus continues to proclaim the Kingdom of God, opposition becomes more intense

- God the Father had sent numerous prophets, and now, finally, he had sent his Son
- By his death and resurrection Jesus will bring about a new community, a new temple
- where God's presence dwells by his Spirit (1 Cor. 3:17–18)
- In this we cannot afford a self-centred approach that talks of my church or our church

Though it does seem so long ago, I remember someone saying this to me as if it were yesterday

- I thought she was old at the time, she was probably about 40 years old
- She said, somewhat critically, 'what would the church be like if everyone were like you?'
- I replied, 'I'm not sure, but what would the church be like, if everyone were like you?'
- It's a question that is worth asking of ourselves
- But, the most important question is, 'what would the church be like if everyone were like Jesus?'

If Jesus is Lord of the church, what kind of church would it be?

- then I must play my part in making it like that

If Jesus is Lord of the world what kind of world would it be?

- then I must play my part in making it like that

If Jesus is Lord of my life what kind of life would that be?

- then by his grace I must allow him to mould and make my life into that
- then I can serve him, in the church and in the world