

One of the tantalizing things about the accounts of the Gospels is that Jesus' lessons are said to have astounded the people, but the contents of those “astounding” lessons are not recorded. Today's reading is one of them.

Jesus entered a synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath and astounded the people with his teaching. I wonder what the resident rabbi of the synagogue felt like to have Jesus come in—to have the stranger come in and speak a storm of a new teaching that impressed, no, astounded, his congregation. Those people who used to close their eyes and enter automatically into the zone, and nodded off their heads the moment he opened his mouth, were all awake and intently listening to the new guy, and wooing and ah-hing. That must not have been good for his self-esteem.

Capernaum was one of the large cities around the lake Galilee at the time, if not the largest. It was also the home town of the

brothers, Peter and Andrew. Capernaum became eventually the home base for Jesus. Jesus repeatedly returns to Capernaum after a long journey.

The Gospel says what Jesus taught astounded the listeners. But the Gospel did not record the content of the lesson. I wanted to know exactly what Jesus said that astounded people. Wouldn't it be great, if we had access to all the astounding lessons Jesus taught?

Anyway, I wonder, was it the new interpretation of the Scriptures, the technique of the delivery, or the eloquence of the gestures? Or, was there an aura of something entirely different that was with Jesus? What exactly made the people to be so astounded?

We will never know. But we can imagine: if it were something that was not of the human origin in its nature, then it is not so impressive. It is so easy to impress and astound the ordinary people with something

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otherworldly, something so magical, or something so divine. It lessens the import of the astonishment, if Jesus had relied on something as advantageous as appearing to be otherworldly, magical, or divine. If Jesus was sharing the truly authentic message of God with the ordinary people, Jesus had to do it in the way the ordinary people could understand and receive. Otherwise, the people would have received it as a gimmickry, a sideshow, and a magical entertainment. I am pretty sure Jesus wanted to avoid such an outcome at all cost.

So I must assume that what Jesus presented at the synagogue had to be something that even the commonest of the ordinary folk could see and understand. That is, what Jesus presented, what Jesus emanated, must have been of the human expression and nature. It must have been something that was very relevant to the everyday life of an ordinary folk—something as common as the lilies of the field, as relevant as the seeds the sower

sprayed, and as useful as the patch of clothe sown onto the old tunic.

From what is utterly ordinary, Jesus brought out the truth of God for all to witness. That must have been the reason why: Jesus shed light unto something that was so obvious in one's life, something that affected just about everyone, but left unrecognized for so long, allowed to go on for so long.

So that is what it was like, that Jesus reintroduced to the crowd the serenity of the sunset, the magnificent waves at the beach, the beauty of the wild flower on the hiking trail? Aren't they what we take for granted? Was Jesus a romantic?

It is true that Christians wanted to portray Jesus as someone whom they could hang around with. Some one who would enjoy the same taste of things, who would share the similar views. People tend to project their internal values and orientations onto Jesus, and then

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discover that they like *that* Jesus so much, they decided that that is what Jesus must be like. It is like voters voting for the presidential candidate with whom they want to drink beer, watch football game together, and pull each other's finger. They identify with themselves the president who is like them folks. You cannot argue with the saying: "Birds of the feather flock together." Instead of becoming like Jesus, people made Jesus like themselves. Even the messages of Jesus became what they would like to hear, what they want to believe. And Jesus must like what they like, too.

What would be one of those common things of life that we tend to overlook, but Jesus would point it out, and shed the new light on it? Um, reading the Sunday paper with a nice, hot cup of brew at the local Peet's, and then going out for a little shopping at Stanford Mall? Or, lounging around at home, watching the game on T.V., and popping open a cool one? Yeah, everyone tends to take it for

granted, don't they? It is so easy to take an ordinary Sunday's leisure for granted. What about those who must work on Sunday, instead, just to make sure their rent is paid, there is food on the table, and clothes on the children's backs, and then come home bone-tired, only to cook, clean, and do the laundry? Yeah, what about them? Who notices those people?

Since watching the T.V. is mentioned, why is it that every time there is a commercial about laundry detergent, dishwashing liquid, toilet bowl cleanser, cleaning the shower, mopping the kitchen floor, taking out the garbage bags, they show women doing all that? Why can't the TV commercial maker do away with the conventional stereotypes of women, but instead, continue to reinforce the stereotypes in their quest for the capitalistic profit? Why are the T.V. stations in the blithe collusion with the advertisers, and ignore it? Or, is it too unfair to hold the commercial structure responsible, because, all they are doing is

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merely serving their clients, and doing their legitimate business?

What is so common, ordinary, everyday thing as a simple T.V. commercial has been taken for granted, that in this day and age, we still have the old-fashioned values still filling the T.V. screens, and indoctrinating ordinary boys and girls of America what their future life is supposed to look like: boys grow up and make money, and girls do the laundry, cook, and clean at home. Do you take for granted such stereotypes on T.V.? And do you think so would Jesus, too?

Did you know that even in the 20th century, the British society maintained the male line of inheritance? If you were the female child, then the estate went to the nearest male relative. Did you know that as early as the 1st century, the small band of Christians in Asia Minor believed and preached that women are co-heirs to the inheritance? The inheritance of the gracious gift of life (NRSV)

that is. It was a revolutionary concept to maintain, especially when women were *given* to the husbands, as if a piece of property changed hands in a transaction. If you doubt your ears, open to I Peter 3:7. It also tells you why your prayers might have been hindered.

Jesus looks at today's world, and has a lot to say about a lot of ordinary things that were taken for granted. What are the things that have been going on for so long but unnoticed, and if noticed, willfully ignored, or allowed to perpetuate? What would Jesus point up and show to us? Would we have allowed things to go on unnoticed, if something happened to 20% of the population? What about to 50%? Yes, or no?

Unfortunately, answers to both questions are a yes. The first was the civil rights of the African Americans, and the second was women's rights. The conventional wisdom has been that women get paid less than men for doing the same work.

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And if they did not like it, and wanted to bring their case to the court, the five Supreme Court Justices, led by Bush appointee, told Lily Ledbetter that she should have done it within 180 days of the first time the discrimination took place.

Finally, the ultimate authority of the land, the Supreme Court ruled. But no one exclaimed that was a new teaching with authority. One contributor to a newspaper observed that, given the fact that many companies forbid the discussion of salaries which are secret, how is the employee to know when she was wronged? Ledbetter came to know about it after many years as a supervisor in Goodyear Tire Co., only because someone slipped her the pay schedule, as she neared retirement.

When she brought the suit, I do not believe she intended it to be one for all working women; but it turned out to be one. When we speak out against injustice, often it takes on the life of its own, and it become big, beyond our

imagination. That is, because, injustice affects everyone who is without privilege. I suspect that the five Chief Justices, Alito, Roberts, Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas, never had to worry about losing their jobs for not being young and single, or about getting paid less for the same work.

And then the new teaching with authority was spoken this past Thursday: it took the new President to sign the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law. How many of us had known, and accepted as the norm that stewardesses had to be young and single, in order to keep their jobs? That a woman had to bring the discrimination suit in the timely manner? That a woman is not suitable for a managerial position, because it required pushing 30 lbs equipment on a dolly, although she carried around 34 lbs typewriter regularly?

A new teaching with authority!
When Jesus sat down and taught those present in the synagogue,

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Jesus did not pull the rank of Son of God, nor the race card of being a privileged Jew, the Elect over the Gentiles. It was just a regular lesson in the plain language that everyone, mostly uneducated and illiterate, could understand.

The privileged of the human society cannot escape from the pitfall of being exclusive, when they maintain the wall of authority. The genuine authority comes from the plain words that everyone—from children to grownups, from the illiterate to Ph.D.s, and from the plebeians to the nobilities—could understand and receive. We must remember, the Protestant Reformation could not have happened, unless The 95 Theses were printed in the vernacular German, so that every one could read about it and figure out just what was going on in the vaunted hall of the papacy. That was a new teaching with authority. The new teaching with authority demands equal opportunity and justice for everyone; anything short of it is merely the form of

authoritarianism in varying degrees and hues.

The authority of Jesus came, not from his appealing to the lineage prophesied from long ago, or from his touting of the voice that affirmed of his Sonship at the river Jordan, or from his ability to perform miracles. Jesus actively discouraged people from telling about the miracles he performed, for this very reason: they are exclusive things, and they lead people to the ways he did not intend.

Jesus' authority came, instead, from the way he spoke and taught. He appealed to the wide range of listeners. He pointed out to them what they have been seeing all their lives, what they have been subjected to all their lives, and what had been oppressing them all their lives, but did not realize, or no one dared doing something about it.

The only people whom he could not reach were those who insisted on living the lifestyle of exclusivity, and took for granted

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the privileges. They were the ones who could not teach a new teaching themselves, they were the ones who did not have the authority, because they spoke only for the limited few. Their lessons were always the same old things—things that advocated what it was, and how things were supposed to be.

As for the unclean spirits coming out of a possessed person, it was the unclean spirits who first recognized the authority of Jesus. Jesus did not flash his badge or pull the strings. The spiritual authority is recognized only by those who are spiritual, or by the spirits themselves. That is not a teaching, and it is not a lesson that we can learn. It is a gift that is given, or it comes from fasting and prayers. Such is the power that emanated from Jesus as God's beloved Son. We do not need to be concerned about what Jesus had, or seek to duplicate it.

We are given, however, the authority. We exercise this authority, when we speak at the right time and at the right place

to describe and name things that have been taken for granted, and regarded as the norm. We may be forced to do it, in order to address our own pain and misery. But God can use it to address the greater injustice under which a great number of people have been oppressed. May God empower you, as you are called to rise up and name the injustice.