

9th Jun2 2024

Mark 3:20-35

LOVING AUTHORITY

A few weeks ago we were with our daughter and her family, when suddenly from another room we heard the loud voice of an angry four year old, ‘No! You’re not the boss of me!’ We just smiled at each other because as grandparents you take some perverse pleasure in your children going through the same parenting trials they put you through. We then heard the voice of Master Four’s father patiently saying, ‘Actually, I am the boss of you, and I love you, and my job is to keep you safe and strong’. As expected, logic doesn’t work with a four-year-old beginning to assert their independence in the world. I have to say though, shortly afterwards it all ended with hugs and “sorry’s”, until the next time the show of independence comes around, which no doubt it has already.

The other night I was flicking around TV channels between shows, when I landed on one of those police reality programs, *Highway Patrol* or something like that. A police officer had just pulled a car over because a scan of the rego plate showed it didn’t fit the car it was on. As the officer was talking to the driver it was finally admitted that the driver had just grabbed the plates and put them on the car because, ‘I needed to go somewhere’. Further checks showed that not only was the driver’s licence suspended, but he had also previously been convicted of driving with a suspended licence. After taking the car’s keys, the officer informed the driver that the car would now be towed away and impounded, and he would be issued with a summons to appear in court. The response, ‘ok, as long as I have it back by the weekend’. No, he was calmly informed, there is no way you will have either the car or your licence back by the weekend, and you will also be issued with large fines. Didn’t he go off! ‘You can’t do that! What gives you the authority! I’m going to go home and get the other key and drive the car away!’ It was a display that would have put the angriest four-year-old to shame, from someone who was a whole lot older and should know better.

Two stories about questioning authority, doubting authority, when we feel like we are being forced into things we don’t want to do, even when those rules or procedures have been put in place

for our own good and safety and that of others. Children, as they grow older, question what their parents tell them to do, or not do, even though parents always act out of love and concern for their children. Laws are made to protect us and others, and then enforced by those who might not say they ‘love’ the people they deal with, but will say they do it out of care because they see firsthand the tragic consequences of breaking those laws. But for us, often, our human reaction is not to see the intentions behind the authority we face, but instead to argue and fight against it.

That’s exactly what is happening in the Gospel account we have here today, which comes right near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Two very different groups are not willing to accept the authority and role Jesus has as God, and for different reasons are trying to stop Him showing and sharing God’s love. We have Jesus’ family, those who love Him and want to protect Him, who at the beginning and end of this reading try to take Him away because they are worried about His safety (rightly so, it later turns out). They think He is crazy, we are told. Then we have Jesus’ enemies, the Teachers of the Law, religious leaders, who are threatened by Jesus because what He is teaching and doing threatens their own authority and influence over the people. So, they question His motives and where His authority comes from by accusing Him of acting with the power of the devil; logic which Jesus is quick to discredit. The bottom line is; if we don’t like what someone is doing, or particularly what they are leading or telling us to do, we question their motives, their methods, where their authority comes from.

We know that the authority God shows to us, including in and through Jesus, is a loving authority. His Laws, His actions, all come out of love for us like the rules and the actions of a parent for a child. But we know also, just like happens in this reading here by both Jesus’ family and enemies, we at times find that loving authority hard to accept and put ourselves under, so like them, and like the four-year-old child or the person who doesn’t like what the police tell them to do, we argue, we discredit, we disregard. We know God loves us, we know everything He calls us to do is for our own good and the good of others, but still we might think and act like we know better.

Why do we do that? Many would say that it’s human nature, and that’s true. As Christians we can go a bit further and say that human nature is formed by original sin. Our first Bible reading

for today, from Genesis three, tells what happened after Adam and Eve broke the one rule God gave them in the Garden of Eden. When God confronted them over that; Adam blamed Eve (and God), Eve blamed the snake, and the snake (devil) didn't have a leg to stand on! They remind me of the bloke I saw on TV the other night; it's not my fault, I just did what I wanted to do. The temptation the devil placed before Adam and Eve was that they could decide what is right and wrong, they could please themselves, they can make the rules. Mmm, how will that turn out?

God's response to this first rebellion against Him? To come to us in love. Right back then He made the first promise that not only would He send the Saviour to bring all people back to Him, but that this Saviour would also defeat Satan, which is what Jesus is getting in trouble for doing in our reading here. God knew that this sin meant our human nature from then on would lead us to continue to rebel and go against Him, and that the only way this could be prevented was by His perfect Son coming to show God's love by being the perfect sacrifice for us.

And whenever we see a baptism, or remember our own baptism, we witness what this loving authority of God means in our lives, every day. All baptisms are special and important, but especially when we baptise a baby we see God in His love coming to us long before we can begin to come to Him. Through the Holy Spirit joining us to Jesus' dying and rising again, God forms a relationship and makes a promise with us which will never be broken from His side. We can call what God now calls us to do 'loving authority' because it is all based on His love and care for us. It means that God will always love and care for us. And above all else it means that the forgiveness Jesus won for us on cross, and the new life He opened up in His resurrection, are always there for us. In our reading here Jesus says that, 'I promise you that any of the sinful things you say or do can be forgiven, no matter how terrible those things are.' (28) The only unforgivable sin, which people sometimes get a bit caught up on, is the sin against the Holy Spirit. This is simply the rejection of faith and all God wants to offer to us. If we are worried about having committed this sin, then we haven't, because that means we still want to be with God and be a part of all He wants to offer to us.

We can see what it looks like for us, either as children or adults, to rebel against and reject authority, but what does it look like, in our daily lives, for us to reject God's loving authority; His call

to follow Him, worship Him, live in His love, share His love? It's about where we put God in our life; time spent with Him, the effort we make to treat others as He calls us to do, where worship fits into our lives, where and how God's Word and prayer fit in for us. Is God just a piece of the pie, or is He the centre and foundation of every part of our lives? It's about how willing we are to not just receive God's forgiveness, generally we all want to do that, but how willing also to show this forgiveness to others. How much do we want to show God's love to others in all we say and do, rather than trying to water down the things we are called to do, or not do, because we'd rather make our own interpretations based on what suits us. It is good for us all to think about these things, and others, and to consider how much we are willing to trust and follow God in all that He wants to do for us and give to us.

As God's people we live under His loving authority. Rather than rebel against it, question it, or deny it, we can embrace it and thank God for all that following Him and living with Him brings to our lives. God grant us forgiveness for those times we do rebel or wander away, as we know we will, and God help us to know, to remember, and to live in and live out His love every day. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What examples do you see of people questioning or disregarding authority today? Are there ways you do this also, perhaps not outwardly and loudly, but even quietly and passively?
- What does God's loving authority mean to you? Are you willing to put yourself fully under His love and call for you?
- Think about how God is calling you to live out His love in your life: The love He calls you to show to others. The choices He calls you to make in your priorities. The witness you can make in your life. How do you go in doing these things? Is there any aspect of your life you find it difficult to place under God's loving authority? Bring this to God and ask for both His forgiveness and help.

Prayer: thank God for His love and forgiveness, which are never ending. Ask God to help us to put ourselves and all our lives under His loving authority each day.

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