

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Fleeing from Authority”

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And Jesus said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt.28:18).

At the national level, what a crummy week! As if the virus wasn't enough, now all this. Protests start out peaceful, but then follows the violence and the looting and the uninhibited defiance of authority, of police orders, of city curfews, of the rule of law.

It was sparked by a policeman defying authority himself, his training, the expectations of his superiors, and, in fact, defying God's authority by snuffing the life out of man. And it continues with the defiance of authority.

For Americans, defying authority is a big part of our history beginning with the revolutionary war. We come from rebels and rascals who wanted nothing to do with submitting to the authority of the British crown. We come from people who were oppressed culturally or economically by their governments. Many of us here come from people who didn't want to have to worship in bland, watered down protestant churches as mandated by the Prussian Union. In short, we come from people who were being pushed around by the authorities. Therefore, Americans seem to have an almost inherit mistrust of authority. A 2018, Chapman University survey of Americans found the number one fear was the corruption of government authorities. In 2019, Pew said 75% of Americans feel distrust for government.

But it's not just Americans. Think of it. We've been on the flight for centuries. In the Reformation, we fled the authority of the pope. Under rationalism, we fled from the authority of Scriptures. The flight continues in our times as we resist conforming to social norms and institutions. Obedience is out, a thing of the past. It's all about independence and autonomy and personal freedoms. Simply put, we don't anyone telling us what we can and cannot do.

Of course, all of this goes back to Genesis three, where Adam and Eve didn't want to submit to God's authority. They wanted to be like God. They exerted their freedoms against the will of their Creator.

Similarly, we also have problems with authority. It seems written in our DNA. And here comes Jesus saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” That's a striking claim. “All authority.” That leaves out nothing. Does that make you nervous?

We've all seen the bumper sticker, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” And we've seen so many cases of that from kings and emperors to presidents and governors. We see the abuse of authority among doctors, clergy, teachers, CEO's, and parents. Wherever men and women have authority, there are countless examples of its abuse.

We often use what authority we have to take things. In the Old Testament, when the people rejected God as their King and were demanding to have a king like all the other nations, Samuel tried to reason with them. “He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses . . . he will take your sons to plow *his* ground and reap *his* harvest. He will take your daughters to be his perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your

fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain. . . He will take the tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves.” We often use what authority we have to take things.

Jesus is different. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He has absolute power. But he uses it to bless us. He doesn't take. He gives. He doesn't make us his slaves, but his friends. He doesn't demand our servitude. He serves us. Remember, he had an inner circle who jostled for power and authority. So, what does he do? He gets down on the floor and washes their feet, showing them what real authority is all about.

You recall how the devil tried to tempt him in the wilderness, bribe him, corrupt him. Showing him the kingdoms of the world, the devil said, “All this I will give you if you will just bow down and worship me.” But Jesus could not be bribed, bought or corrupted. He frustrates the devil with his submission to the authority of Scripture.

All authority belongs to him, but he doesn't exercise it for his own comfort. To the contrary: he allowed himself to be falsely accused, tried, mocked, tortured, crucified . . . and all for us, because he doesn't use his authority to take stuff from us, but to give.

In the Old Testament lesson, we read how God used his authority to create the heavens and earth. Similarly, he gives you your body, soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and senses, clothing, shoes, food, drink, house and home, spouse and children . . . all that you need. With his authority, he sets limits on the evil plans of men, but to you, he gives himself, his holy precious blood, his innocent suffering and death. He gives you his redemption, his forgiveness. He gives you his name to bear. You are a Christian. He gives you your status as a baptized child of God.

Our God uses his authority to bless and serve us, not himself. He uses his authority to give, not to take. The only thing he takes away from you is your sin, and your death.

Unchecked power in the hands of an earthly king is a terrible thing. But all authority in the hands of Jesus is a source of joy and comfort. Think of it: the same one who created the heavens and the earth, despite all appearances to the contrary, is still in charge: not the virus, not the riotous crowds, not the devil, not wicked men in all their scheming, not self-serving politicians . . . Jesus. Try as they might, they cannot escape his rule, and if they had their heads on straight, they would not want to, for he is good and wise and merciful and gracious and generous and compassionate, slow to anger, quick to forgive.

You don't want for yourselves any authority who loves power more than he loves you. You don't want the one who lusts for power, grasps at it, clings to it. You don't want to follow the one who will sling mud or make impossible promises to be elected, nor the one who will tweak the laws to serve himself. You want to follow the One who empties himself for you, gives up his strength and lays down his life for you. You want to follow the One who “was born under the law to redeem those under the law” (Gal.4:4).

Those who don't know Jesus still flee from him. But we know him, and so we flee to him.

“All authority has been given to me” Jesus said. All of it . . . in heaven and on earth. That's the best news I've heard all week. Amen.