The Question of Authority

Mark 11:27-33

This morning we will look at one of the many encounters Jesus had with the religious authorities. This encounter we read in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, where the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders questioned Jesus' authority. Their aim though was to find a treacherous reason to condemn Him and eliminate Him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "Who gave you authority to do this?" Jesus answered with a question of His own. "John's baptism - was it from heaven or from men?" The leaders discussed it among themselves and could not come with a proper answer. "So," Jesus said, "I will not tell you by what authority."

I chose this topic about authority, for it is the 4th of July weekend and we celebrate our independence. Independence means we are subject to no foreign authority. It means we are free. But are we really? Remember there is always the government, and the authority of the state. And then there is God and the authority of religion. The question is who should we submit our allegiance, and is there a conflict? Jesus was once asked this same question and he responded saying, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"  (Mark 12:17)

We all know what belongs to the government, and what the government expects from you and me. It is our civic duties and mainly it is material. So give your coin to the government, but do not expect the Government to satisfy all your desires and provide for all your needs. The authority of the government is limited unless it is recognized to be from God and supplemented with His authority. Only God provides full satisfaction and it is mainly spiritual. So give God what He expects and it is your heart. Also remember, while you are never totally free under the authority of the government, you are free under the authority of God. Jesus came to give us the truth about God and His authority and that truth set us free. So, while you serve the local authority, remember to place your faith on God, have full trust in Him and love Him beyond the limits. You you will never be put to shame.

That day Jesus had more than one reason not to answer to the leaders right away. One reason was the fact that He had already given an answer earlier, when He said, "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). But His real aim was to give those who questioned His authority an opportunity to think over. If Jesus gave them His answer right away, they would immediately condemn Him and thus condemn themselves. And then the story would be over and we would say "amen". But that is not how God acts. God gives opportunity to witness the goodness of His authority, and sometimes you see it when other authorities fail or hurt.

My hope and prayer is that you take this story about Jesus' encounter with the religious authorities as your opportunity to rethink about Jesus and the goodness of God's authority. When you submit to His authority, that is when you open and dedicate your heart to Him, He will bless you with heavenly peace and you will be set free.

Amen