

**Epiphany 4, Year B**  
**February 1, 2015**  
**St. Stephen's Episcopal Church**  
The Rev. Shari Young, Preacher

Authority

When I was 19 I began studying Zen Buddhism with a Japanese Zen Master who had come at the invitation of a Claremont College professor and a committee formed to bring Zen to the West.

Zen Master Joshu Sasaki was sent from Myoshinji Temple in Kyoto temple, headquarters for the Rinzai Zen, the strictest and most rigorous sect.

Our Zen practice had all the traditional elements of a Japanese temple from meditation, to meditation hall and its officers, to our food and what we wore. The Roshi, or Zen Master, was the absolute authority. The Board of Directors, and the Abbot of the Zen Center were there to make possible whatever Roshi wanted.

It's comforting to live like this and many people do. Turning over authority for how to live, and what to do, especially with spiritual overtones feels very safe.

After about 5 years, I transitioned from Zen practice to a an Episcopal church, the community of my boyfriend in the Zen Center. This church was very involved in what was called "the Charismatic Renewal" a very popular movement in both Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches.

Central authority was given both to the Bible and to "indwelling of the spirit" of each individual in the community. The teachings of the Bible, especially as clarified by pastors and teachers were central to values and life choices.

After about 10 years in this community, I was motivated to seek ordination in the Episcopal church and went to seminary across the bay at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the Episcopal seminary in Berkeley. There I learned about the Anglican view of authority in the church.

Put simply: Based on the writings of Richard Hooker, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Anglican theologian, Episcopalians believe that authority has three aspects: Scripture or the Bible is primary, our church tradition, and lastly our reason. I came to understand that many added experience to this. Authority as based on the Bible, our church tradition, reason, and our experience.

There is a wonderful calm Englishness to this, and it seems reassuring to add reason and the sum of our experience to what we see at a distance to be the rigid doctrine and practice of other Christian denominations.

But this is all rather cool and cerebral, I like the immediacy of the vision of authority that today's gospel portrays.

Jesus has just gathered his disciples and they immediately swoop into the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath day. Jesus stands up to teach and he provokes the hornets nest of an evil spirit who recognizes him clearly for who he is: The Holy One of God. The darkness stands out sharply when the bright light of the Holy is turned on.

Jesus ministry begins in Mark with teaching and the casting out of a demon. To be clear Jesus did not cast the man out, he healed the man of his darkness and returned him to the community and in doing so no doubt began a process of healing for the entire community.

Jesus did not exclude the man with the unclean spirit, he included him. This is our ministry: a ministry of inclusion, not exclusion.

Jesus showed his disciples and he shows us, what we are to do. We are to be healers, and reconcilers, and those who work for justice and do acts of mercy.

About authority: We have our own inner authority as well. One of the gifts of aging is this development of our authentic self. The one who sees, and knows, and has wisdom. This inner self can also be ego, but our work is to heal ourselves and to bring light more and more into the center of who we are, giving us the authority of holiness.

Just as Jesus brings light into the world, so we too are called to be bearers of light.