

Jon Hauerwas – July 3, 2016 – “The Summons”
Matthew 4:18-22 and Luke 10:1-11

How would you define power? How about authority? What are the differences between the two? The British author G.K. Chesterton was once sharing a meal with a literary friend in London when their conversation shifted to these subjects. At one point, Chesterton remarked, “If a rhinoceros were to enter this restaurant now, there is no denying he would have great power here. But I should be the first to rise and assure him that he had no authority whatsoever.”¹

Power and authority. According to the social theorist Max Weber, power has a coercive element and authority has a noncoercive one. “You can do what I ask of you because you *have* to do what I have the power to make you do. Or you can do what I ask of you because you *want* to do it out of respect for who I am to you. The difference between the(se) two motives is huge.”²

Unfortunately, power is often associated with the use of force. But, this need not be the case. And, in fact, quite the opposite is often true. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he regularly demonstrated tremendous power. And yet, this power was derived neither from threats, violence, or coercion, but from love.

¹ Peter W. Marty, “The Secret of Authority,” *The Christian Century*, June 22, 2016, Pg. 3.

² *Ibid.* Pg. 3.

Just consider, for example, our gospel lesson from last Sunday. At that time, we heard the story of Jesus' ability to command the unclean spirits to leave a naked, tormented, marginalized, and shackled man named Legion. In the midst of that extraordinary display, Jesus exhibited great power to heal. And because the display was public in nature, his power was clearly visible to all.

Next, those who witnessed the event went to the country and to the city. They found everyone that they knew and said, "Come and see that Legion has been healed. Yes, Legion. The man who lived in the tombs. The one who was bound with shackles. The one whom we could not contain. I know that this sounds crazy, but he was healed – completely – by a foreigner who came to our shores. Come and see for yourselves." So the "people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found Legion sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind."

We already know that Jesus exhibited great power. He possessed power over the elements – the ability to command the wind and waves. He had the power to heal and, most importantly, the power to forgive sins. And, it was in these demonstrations of power that many began to recognize Jesus' authority and, in turn, offer their loyalty to him.

So while power and authority have much in common, there are many important distinctions between them. Just consider the world of organized crime. A mobster, for example, is willing to offer so called “protection” to business owners in exchange for a weekly tax. But, the protection is non-existent, and the owners are left in a difficult bind, knowing that they must either comply with the demand or risk damage to property or harm to themselves and their families. Clearly, the mobster offers a form of power, but it is one which is rooted in the threat of coercive violence.

With Jesus, there is no coercion or manipulation. He simply offers the gift of healing. The gift of liberation and freedom. In response to this gift, Legion begs Jesus to take him along. And he does this without even the slightest hint of where Jesus and the rest of the disciples might be going next. He’s willing to follow Jesus anywhere, into the midst of an unknown future, because as Peter Marty writes, what people saw in Jesus’ acts of power “was the power of love,” which “is the secret of the Lord’s authority.”³

Our first lesson this morning is a call story. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus approaches two sets of brothers. All four men of these men are fishermen. There is no indication that they know Jesus, and there no mention in this narrative of healing,

³ *Ibid.* Pg. 3.

or teaching, or the forgiveness of sins. There is no overt demonstration of Jesus' power in this passage. There is no coercion, no threat, and no violence. Instead, he speaks as one with authority, saying simply, "Follow me."

The most obvious responses would have been, "No." "Why?" "Who are you?" or "Where are you going?" But, there is no conversation of the sort. Instead, these men, who are to become four of Jesus' first twelve disciples, are said to leave their nets, and their boats, and their family connections and follow without ever speaking a word, just as Jesus requested.

One scholar calls this "Jesus' first miracle, the miracle of his powerful word that creates following, that makes disciples." ⁴ Yes. "The messianic community, the church, comes into being in response to Christ's own word." ⁵ "In this text Jesus appears disruptively in our midst and calls us not to admire him or accept his principles, not even to accept him as our personal Savior, but to follow him." ⁶

These four fishermen "are already at work, already doing something useful and important, thus they are not looking for a new life. Jesus' call does not fill an

⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII*, ed. Leander Keck (Abingdon Press, 1995). Pg. 169.

⁵ *Ibid.* Pg. 170.

⁶ *Ibid.* Pg. 170.

obvious vacuum or meet an obvious need in their lives, as was the case with Legion, a man who had nothing positive to return to. But, like the call of prophets in the Hebrew Bible, it is intrusive and disruptive, calling them away from their work and family.”⁷ The fishermen do not yet know the destination, which they must learn along the way.”⁸

This, I would argue, is the nature of commissioning. God commissions us or sends us out into the world to perform certain duties, tasks, and functions on God’s behalf. But, we know only in part where that journey will lead us, who we will encounter, and what we will do along the way.

Legion wanted to stay with Jesus. But, Jesus had other plans, telling him to go and become the first disciple among the gentile Garasenes. And soon, we will commission the youth of this church to serve in mission in West Virginia. A plan was already in place, that they might help those in a rural, impoverished place, just as others have been doing for a very long time. And then, what happened? Perhaps, you’ve seen it in the news. The flood waters came, and the call to serve took on an entirely different form.

⁷ *Ibid.* Pg. 171.

⁸ *Ibid.* Pg. 170.

The twelve disciples were called and commissioned. And after them the 70.
And after them our ancestors in the faith. Now, today, we have heard the summons.
And we go forth, just like the saints of old, with the power and authority of God.
And we go, not to manipulate or coerce, but to extend God's peace to every home
we visit and every person we meet. May it be so and all thanks be to God both now
and forever. Amen.