

Epiphany 4—January 31, 2021
Text: Mark 1:21-28
Theme: You Really Are Deplorable

It is not surprising to us that Jesus taught as one who had authority. Obviously, he has all authority in Heaven and on Earth so how else would he speak? But what is surprising is how often we forget that he really does have all authority. When we truly believe that Jesus has all authority, it changes the way we live and think because we conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with believing that he has all things under his control.

Now that does not translate into keeping the Law. The Law commands us to be holy as God is holy, and we strive to keep that Law, but if our lives revolve around law, we will ultimately fail. We cannot be holy. If we could be holy on our own, there would have been no reason for Christ to die and be damned in our place. That's why the people who heard him speak in the synagogue were astonished. These are people who lived under the Law, and they strove to keep the Law of God with their every fiber. They had even added hundreds of laws to the 10 Commandments in an effort to be certain they were keeping the Law of God. Therein lies the problem. You cannot find the strength you need to keep the Law by keeping the Law. It's a vicious circle. If I use the Law to remain holy and I fail constantly at keeping the Law, the harder I try to use the Law to remain holy, the more I fail and the cycle spirals down

deeper and deeper into despair. The religious people of Jesus' day had more or less given up. You just had to keep the prescribed rules, make the prescribed sacrifices and call it good enough. There were some who were better at appearing holy than others, and they were the ones who rose to the top of the system.

So, when Jesus came and taught the Gospel, and taught as one who had authority, they were astonished. How could it be that easy? How could it be that God simply gave them forgiveness without any worthiness or merit on their part? The most miserable failures at keeping the Law clung to Jesus and followed. When you are desperate, Jesus offers you forgiveness, peace and love. When you know that you are deplorable, the Gospel washes you, feeds you and gives you hope. However, the people who only appeared righteous because they were outwardly keeping a great many rules, detested him. He was giving away the store! So, they sought how to get rid of him before he destroyed the very system that had profited them so well.

It is really little different today. There are people who love the Law because they appear to be so good at keeping it. It is no longer necessarily God's Law they keep, however. Now we have different societal laws that make you a good person if you keep them. One is, "Thou shalt tolerate all behavioral aberrations." Every perversion of God's creation must be tolerated because one of the sacred societal laws

is that everyone has a right to live how ever they wish and everyone else has to approve of it. Another law is "Thou shalt pretend that thou hast no bias based on race, creed or culture." Of course, we have bias and prejudice. We all like our way of being best. While it is against God's Law to hurt or harm anyone for any reason, it is perfectly okay to have personal preferences, and the belief that you are right is not a sin unless it is contested by God's Law. A third is "Thou shalt never suggest that anyone's difficulty or hardship was brought on by his own choices and perhaps he should suffer the consequences of those choices."

Consequences are a gift from God to bring us back from sin. Take consequences away and you impede the cutting of the Law. Where there is no cutting by the Law, there can be no healing of the Gospel. Good people keep these societal laws and people who do not keep the societal laws are deemed evil at worst or ignorant at best. They are deplorables.

Well first off, here's a news flash. We are not good people. I have some sad news for you. We, my friends truly are the deplorables of which some have accused us. I count myself proudly among you. I am horrible at keeping God's Law and I have no interest in keeping society's laws. I can fake it like the rest of you but I am deplorable, and I am, therefore, exactly who Jesus came to save. Unlike society, Jesus comes to us with a message of hope and love and forgiveness. That's why the demon rose up against him in the Gospel. He was not fooled for a minute. This attitude

of love and forgiveness is exactly what brings ruin to the self-righteous, pietistic societal do-gooders. If we deplorable excuses for human beings are forgiven of all our sins and made righteous in the eyes of God, what good are all their rules and regulations? I can laugh at their demands to embrace various societally approved sinful behaviors. The King of Creation has freed us from this world, and we are not bound by its nonsense.

This will not win you any friends among the self-righteous societal do-gooders. They will condemn you for being intolerant, unloving and ignorant. They will demand that the Church bow to their laws or be undone and we deplorables laugh at them. We laugh because our King has already promised us that the gates of Hell will not prevail against us, and because we know that our King has all authority and they do not. No earthly ruler can scare us. No earthly situation will worry us. Our King has all authority and he has died on the cross to pay for every single deplorable thing we have ever thought, said or done. He looks at us, and because he died and was damned for us, it is finished. He does not see deplorables. He sees holy children of God and that is the last word, because it is His word. Never let those who are righteous by worldly standards condemn you. You have been freed by the King whose steadfast love is with us always.