



*Jesus Is The Supreme Authority*

*A sermon on Mark 1:21-28*

*(The Doctrine of Sovereignty)*

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First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable? That was the question at the center of a Supreme Court case back in 1893. John Nix and his four sons owned an import company in New York City. Up until then everything was going well for them. The fruits and vegetables they were bringing in from Florida and California were arriving unspoiled. Sales were up and the company was growing. All that changed when Edward Hedden, the Collector of the Port of New York, learned what exactly the Nixs were shipping. At that time, all imported vegetables were slapped with a 10-percent tariff but fruits were not. Ed claimed tomatoes were a vegetable and therefore must be taxed. Well, John and his sons thought tomatoes were a fruit. So they went to court to settle the issue.

Well, the Nix family lost their case, but they did not give up. The Nix's appealed... again, and again, to a higher court, each one with more authority than the last. Eventually they appealed to the highest authority they could, the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has the most power in this type of case so it made sense that they would turn there for the answer, are tomatoes a fruit or vegetable? The family argued their case before Justice Horace Grace. Justice Grace listened to what they had to say, but the judge thought it was a vegetable because people ate it like one. Justice Grace, the ultimate authority in this instance, did not rule in their favor. He declared a tomato was a vegetable and therefore should be taxed. The Nix family had to listen to the Supreme Court ruling because it was will final authority in that case. They could appeal no longer. They had to pay the tax. Still today, in legal terms, a tomato is a veggie even though botanically it is a fruit.

Just as the Nix family appealed to the Supreme Court because of its authority we also appeal to different people and things for authority. For people of a certain age, Google has become an authority in most matters. If you don't know the answer to a geography question, ask Google. If you don't know how to fix a leaky faucet, ask Google. If you don't know why your car is making that grinding noise, ask Google. If you want to know what time the movie is playing, ask Google. Even during the lectionary group this week with Pastor Frosty and several other clergy from the area, Google was asked to find a hymn. Google has power. Google has some degree of authority in our lives. For some, more than others.

For those who write or talk for a living, we often appeal to others with more credentials, who are more widely known, and have greater authority to support the claims we wish to make. Journalists and pastors do this all the time. We quote someone more known than ourselves, or use some data to give our work more authority. I admit, I turn to theologians when I am wrestling with questions

about God, the world, and good and evil and when I am preparing a sermon. I think we all appeal to greater authorities because we recognize that our power isn't supreme. Our authority is limited so we need something or someone, else to support our work, to verify it, to authenticate it.

The scribes at the synagogue in our text this morning aren't any different then we are. They knew the limits of their power. They realized others carried more weight than they did. Now, the synagogue was primarily a teaching institution. When people went there for a service they did three things: they prayed together, they read scripture together, and explained the text as best they could. All of this was led by a scribe. To help people more easily embrace what the scribe was saying the scribe would begin their talk by referring back to another scribe who was better known, or had more power, or was a supposed authority on the subject at hand. They appealed to another authority in hopes that it would make what they had to say more credible.

When Jesus arrived at the synagogue that Saturday, everyone who had gathered there to learn expected Jesus to do the same. They would have been right to think he might start by quoting something Moses said or maybe King David. Maybe he would recite some of the 10 Commandments or share an earlier scribe's positions on God and God's activity in the world. Jesus did not start out with any of that. That is the twist in the text this morning we need to pay attention to. Jesus didn't refer to anyone else to help prop up his teachings. As we have heard this morning Jesus taught as one having authority, not as the scribes (Mark 1:22). He didn't need a ruling from the Supreme Court in his favor. He didn't need to Google anything. He didn't need to reference any scribe or scholar. Jesus didn't need to appeal to any other authority. Jesus taught as one with authority because Jesus is the authority.

The recognition that "Jesus is the authority" has serious implications for those who follow him. To acknowledge Jesus as the "authority" of our lives means we take his words to heart and live our lives according to his teachings. Yes we are obedient to the legal structures of our society, but, more than that, we hold Jesus and his teachings as the supreme authority. We get a glimpse of what Jesus authority looks like in the lives of those who follow him in Mark 1:23-26. A man who was suffering came into the synagogue. Immediately Jesus saw him and began to speak to him. The words Jesus spoke to him brought healing into his life. Attention and conversation. That is the way Jesus worked his healing. If that is the way Jesus interacted with those who were suffering then the church is to do the same. We are to look and see who is suffering as Jesus did. We are to begin that search right here in church as Jesus began in the synagogue. Everyone of us carry hurt in our heart. Sometimes we hid it. Sometimes we don't, but we all have it. So we, as followers of Jesus, pay attention to those hurting and when we notice them in our church and in our communities, we engage them. We talk with them. Conversation does not mean someone will be healed, but it does offer them a space to grieve, to lament, or to cry. The hurting man Jesus was talking to cried out and Jesus listened to him. We all need that space and for those who follow Jesus, it is something we do for others because we recognize Jesus' authority in our lives.

The Nix family sought a higher authority when they went to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately for the Nix family tomatoes aren't mentioned in the Bible, but if they were Jesus would be the final

authority on their classification. Like the Nix family we seek authority when we consult Google or refer to a distinguished persons thoughts. However, none of those things or people are the ultimate authority in our life. As followers of Jesus we live according to his teachings and so we pay attention to the hurting and listen to them and give them space to cry out. For Christians Jesus is the ultimate authority in all matters.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.