

By whose authority.

John 1:19 – 22.

In the first chapter of John, Jesus Christ is introduced into history. "The word was God... The word became flesh" (John 1:1, 14). In sweeping poetic words, God's plan for a new world is revealed. We receive the invitation to participate by receiving and becoming God's children. Jesus provides this intimate gift by becoming the word of God in flesh.

Now, the gospel introduces Jesus in history. "Now this was John's testimony. When the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was." (John 1:19). It was an odd question to ask. The priests and Levites new John. His father was a priest and Levite. His mother came from the tribe of Levites. The Jewish leaders not only knew his lineage, they knew his reputation. A movement of religious fervor was boiling on the banks of the Jordan River and John the Baptist was the center of the commotion.

In the holy land then and now, politics and religion are bedfellows. Religious leaders were concerned with every religious movement that might become political. The political power of Rome was concerned with every religious movement that might pose opposition. When the leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was, their motive was not to get acquainted with this wilderness preacher, "tell us who you are because we would like to get to know you." The motive of the Jerusalem hierarchy was much more pointed, "who do you think you are, baptizing people and stirring up this religious fervor without our approval. And supervision?"

John answers their question three times, and with each answer. He repeats the same point: I do not have any authority. First, he tells them, "I am not the Messiah." (John 1:19). John freely confessed that he did not have the authority of the anointed one of Israel, the champion of God, the Savior of God's people. That authority was reserved for Christ alone.

Second, when asked if he was Elijah, he said, "I am not." (John 1:21). Elijah had gone to heaven in an unusual way. Many hopeful people anticipated that he would return from heaven as the and operation of a new era of peace and salvation. John the Baptist freely confessed that he did not have the authority of Elijah. Third, he also confessed he did not have the authority of a prophet. When asked, he answered simply, "No" (John 1:21).

To surrender all authority is frightening and freeing. We all deal with authority issues, that is, our own authority. John the Baptist exemplifies radical spirituality and trust in God: he relinquished all his authority. You see, whenever we talk about our authority, the focus is all about us. In fact, author is the heart of the word authority. John the Baptist was saying that he is not the author of all this. It all belongs to God.

John the Baptist surrendered his authority to the one who receives supreme authority, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him." (John 1:32). It is an act of faith to surrender your own authority to the authority of Jesus Christ.