

**“The Authority in Each of Us”**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost -- September 27, 2020**  
**Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor**  
**Iao United Church of Christ**

**Philippians 2:1-13 & Matthew 21:23-32**

Poem: “*God’s Authority*” by Alberto Casing

*“We are like sheep who tend to stray,  
And choose to walk in our own way;  
Yet we are joined by a golden cord,  
A blond which binds us to the Lord.  
We know it when we hear God’s call,  
For God lifts us up each time we fall.”*

I am recalling a saying told to me – and I can imagine that many of you have been asked something similar – “well who died and made you king?” Do we remember that being asked of us?

I was invited to say a prayer for a social justice march and when I arrived, I was dressed up in my pastoral garb. In the email, I was given instructions to enter from a different secured route to the park. When I arrived at the gate, my name was erroneously left off the list but luckily the coordinator of the event who had invited me was at the gate and escorted me to the holding area. As we were leaving the gated area, a young – well not so young lady snaps with – “well who died and made him king?” I stopped and looked back and responded – “Jesus.”

Beloved community – when we are given the opportunity, the authority to speak – we either speak with our mouths or we speak with our actions – or both. When we are standing against the injustices of our society, or maybe our own churches or any other entity in our society – when we are fully living out the gospel from within us – from within our inward center – it is God, it is Christ, it is the Holy Spirit that gives us such authority to speak. When we speak from the mouth – we use

words that reflect our Christ-like walk that we have learned from the gospels. It is Christ that speaks through us, not of our own understanding, but how we allow the gospels to speak for themselves – this is the “if necessary – use words” part of our United Church of Christ beliefs. When we speak through our actions, we are present in Christ and who Christ is in our lives reflects and radiates from within us – no words are necessary. It is like, when we stand against the injustices of this world right along God’s children, the very authority within each of us can cause change to happen.

Before graduating from Seminary, I was struggling between wearing a collar or not wearing a collar. I was not that comfortable in being called Reverend. It was not until I had a conversation with a houseless individual in Berkeley, CA that helped guide me to my new identity. It was as if Christ was speaking with such authority through him.

“What would you like me to call you?” “You can call me Tino, Tino is fine.”

“Why not Reverend, you’re a Reverend, right?” “I hope to be, but even then, you can call me ‘Tino.’” “In this world we have a lot of ‘Tino’s’ but what we need right now in this world is a ‘Reverend Tino,’ I need you, we need you to be a ‘Reverend’ in this moment and time, can you do that for us.” “Thank you, yes, yes, I can, and it looks like I have received my new identity from Christ, through your words.”

Beloved community, in my struggle, with the authority given through a houseless individual in Berkeley, CA, I received my new identity as, “Reverend Tino.” I am still comfortable with Tino, Pastor, Pastor Tino, Rev. Tino – but there are times when the authority in me is needed out in a world in need – there are times when the authority in each of us is needed out in our world today – whether that be in words or actions.

The religious leaders who were challenging Jesus did not realize where their authority was coming from. The scribes received their authority by being born into the tribe of Levi. Just by mere birth they grew up with authority or were the recipients of authority based on birth. They were clueless that Jesus “was” the “authorizer.” You see beloved Church – after this incident in scripture, Jesus gives his followers, and now to us, the “great commission.” “Go into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Creator, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Jesus gives each of us such authority as was given to him by God. Beloved Iao Church – beloved brothers and sisters out in our virtual world – How many people have been inspired by our words or our presence of authority given to us by Christ? How many people have been spiritually baptized by Christ because of our words or our mere presences? Are we Church? Are we living out the gospels in our lives? Are we speaking with such authority – so as to inspire others to feed God’s people, quench their thirst, heal their wounds, comfort the afflicted, or bring discomfort to the comfortable? Or are we content in quoting our earthly authorities for the sake of expediency?

Beloved community – I do not believe we are given authority to be “finger pointers” but to be inspirers of the Gospels – Amen? While others choose to exclude – let us continue to include, let us say to the divorced, prostitutes, tax collectors, the “othered” of our society – we love you and you are God’s beloved. Not because we are privileged or born into a certain kind of tribe, but because God works through our imperfection, and because of who God – of who Christ is in our lives, and in the life of our beloved Iao Church – Amen and praise be to God!

You see beloved Church, what bothered the scribes more was not how Jesus preached, how he prayed, how he healed, or how he fed people. What bothered the scribes most was that people – the marginalized, those left out of Synagogues and Temples, the “sinners” were being moved by Jesus’ words and actions into faith.

The scribes were worried about becoming insignificant. Jesus was creating a revolution with the same people who were considered outsiders – and this kind of authority superseded all other authority.

Let us close with this beloveds. We must always remember that the authority within each of us is given to us for God's dominion here on earth – which is to do good. We must be willing to apply this authority to the problems of our world today – to heal, to proclaim, to change, to bring redemption, to expel hatred, to expel racism and all the other ugly “isms” of our world – and to prepare the world for reconciliation. We cannot just sit back and define the problems of the world, we must bring the power of the Church to bear, not by finger pointing, but by inspiring others through words and actions. We can still do that from our House Churches – each time we go shopping or when we can and check up on each other. Let us be of same faith as tax collectors and prostitutes – as people out in the margins of society or anyone who is deemed as an outsider. For the authority within each of us calls us to be “in communion” with all of God's beloved children.

**Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.**