

‘On whose authority?’

Introduction

Women who attend church regularly live longer – so says a report from Harvard University this week. House prices could fall by as much as 18% if we leave Europe – according to the ‘Remain’ campaign. Eat more fat to lose weight – suggested a campaign group. So for all women keen to lose weight, maintain the value of their housing portfolio and live longer they should go to church, eat fat and vote to stay in Europe!

Today I want us to think about

- on whose authority we form opinion
- what authority does Jesus have in our lives, and
- what has Jesus authorised us to do?

In summary – our mindset, mentor and mandate

On whose authority do you form your opinions? Our MINDSET

David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn, Barak Obama, The Queen, Prince Harry, The Pope, Justin Welby, Tony Blair, Donald Trump? Whose voice has authority in your life? Perhaps it’s a radio personality like Jeremy Vine, perhaps you trust your family’s views, do you rely on your own inner voice – your gut instinct? When you’re tempted does the Father of lies

whisper ‘just this once’ or ‘it doesn’t really matter does it?’ Or perhaps the Ten Commandments have become your liberating friends, releasing you from the modern ailment of deciding whether or not to transgress and just hope you don’t get caught?

These days, we have celebrity without much integrity, too much information, sound bites without substance, policies without planning.

Whether or not we attend church, how we vote, what we eat – these are determined by life choices that are informed by various influences, some deliberate some more subtle. Are you superstitious, do you read a horoscope, feel fated by your inherited genetic makeup? I wonder who Reggie takes after?

How do you respond when someone you love is very sick? Let’s remind ourselves what happened in the case of the centurion and his highly valued slave.

[Background to the passage](#)

In St Luke’s account, reliable information had reached the centurion that there was an amazing healer who had arrived in town, not a fraud, not a trickster – the real deal, someone with real authority and integrity – a true statesman. In fact, someone re-writing the storyline of

flash-in-the-pan would-be revolutionaries. This Jesus fellow was genuine and seemed to have a direct line to the Jewish deity and commanded hordes of committed followers known as disciples. He was re-writing the lives of the marginalised and caring for them, making them central to his mission not casting them aside like many of the religious establishment.

The military leader has a sickly slave whom he values very highly and so asks others to beg Jesus to make the order and so bring about healing. No physicians would be deployed, no potions or lotions, no medication. Simply the instruction from this messiah would be sufficient to drive away the illness, to restore life, to resurrect the ailing servant. The word itself was powerful enough, the voice of one calling upon all the resources and connections to the author and perfecter of creation and created.

Jesus and His Father are one and anything asked in his name is granted – that is, those who know the will of God will request those things that He is happy to grant.

Quite how much of this was understood by the centurion is unknown but Jesus' reputation as the author of a new order, a new kind of kingdom in which the blind see, the

deaf hear and the lame walk was evident enough to the centurion.

God is a God who heals and restores, always has been, always will. We just don't know when or how – but that is His prerogative. Two things are certain, if we never ask for healing, it's unlikely to happen and secondly, no-one's faith is questionable because they are not healed. Thousands of people prayed for the evangelist David Watson and still he died – this came as a relief to a disabled lady who had been told all her life the reason she hadn't been healed was due to a lack of faith or some unconfessed sin.

In St Luke's account, Jesus and the centurion never meet, yet their deeds and words of love convey authority and command respect from one another. Reputation precedes them and each recognises the role of authority and their position within a hierarchy. The centurion, a foreign Gentile of uncertain belief, makes demands upon the respected Jewish leaders and upon his friends. In turn they respond because he commands their respect. By contrast his soldiers go where he orders because they are paid to and his slaves have to do as he says, because he owns them.

Why does Jesus respond to the request? He's not paid nor owned, indeed hasn't even met the guy. It's because it fits

in with his mission to the world. Once we're clear what our role is, we can prioritise and determine where we should devote our time and energy.

That was Mindset we considered.

What authority does Jesus have in our lives? MENTOR

Are you his friend, his volunteer, his soldier or slave?

If you're his friend you might do him a favour from time to time, help him move house, feed the cat, pop round for a chat, go out for a pint? But there again when life gets busy you might not catch up with him for while; get busy with work or the family and resort to tagging him your Facebook status update.

If you're a volunteer in the Jesus movement, you might sign up to a rota, ask how he is over coffee at the end of the service, perhaps even mention him at work. There again, you've got other commitments and can only fit him in around the insane juggling, the out-of-control life balance

Are you Jesus' soldier – do you see yourself in a spiritual battle and you approach each day like you're warding off the corrosive influence of foreign types who are infecting and corrupting our way of life. Fear drives your motivation

to preserve tradition, retain culture keep out the advancing migrant and stranger?

What about Jesus' slave? - not a popular notion, slavery and a somewhat embarrassing aspect of Bristol's past. However, in our gospel passage the slave is described as highly valued- we do know of slaves being treated well and eventually given their freedom. Nevertheless, when you are the property of another, you have little choice but to do as you're told.

Friends influence our opinions and affect our decisions. Volunteers offer their time and talents but are free to withdraw the offer of help at any time. Soldiers are paid to respond and trained not to question and interestingly slaves like Joseph could influence their masters and eventually be granted tremendous authority. Joseph's interpretative skills earned him the respect of Pharaoh.

Yet the relationship of the believer to Jesus is as adopted child, a son or daughter who inherits the kingdom of God. The believer is given authority as an ambassador of the Lord God Almighty to represent him, to point others to him in every aspect of life at all times and in all places to give thanks for Him. Another description for such a person is a disciple – one who not only follows the teaching, adopts

the spiritual disciples but is transformed by the new way of life that they become increasingly Christ-like.

I wonder how much authority Aaron and Joanna will have in Reggie's life? I suspect until he's perhaps secondary school age, quite a lot. We hope and pray that as he begins this journey of faith that parents and godparents will guide him and from time to time give him orders some of which will make sense to Reggie and be obeyed. However, this might not always continue! Disciples of Christ learn to stop thinking as a child and realise that we can afford to put our trust in the authority of Jesus who loves and builds community into which we can be nurtured and flourish.

On Thursday evening

this week I learnt that countries that sign up to belong to NATO also agree to issue orders compliant with a standard formula. This takes the form of an initial briefing, the Warning Order, perhaps something like lift that barge or tote that bail. After some initial preparation there's the Main Order giving details of timescales, constraints, resources and crucially the mission itself is repeated twice so that everyone present, however sleep-deprived they might be, will absorb the vital essentials of the mission. So, only days before today's talk I learn of someone in authority giving orders and learning how to brief their

commanding officer. The need for a clear message and mission is as relevant this week as it has ever been.

We've looked at our mindset, mentor and now our mandate...

What has Jesus authorised us to do? Our Mandate

The question therefore is what is our mission as a church for such a time as this and will we respond to it as an order from the authority of Jesus?

When we are ordered by God to go here or do that, how can we have confidence to obey – God doesn't force us but faith is developed, the flames are fanned when we remind ourselves exactly in whom it is we put our trust to follow: a lover of people and a builder of his church, God is working his purpose out and choosing to deploy you and me as his trusted inner circle, his own family. Jesus does not issue us with polite suggestions, these are your orders: do justice, love mercy walk humbly with your God, love your neighbour – are we?

Perhaps the clearest mandate

Jesus ever gave to those who profess to believe and follow him was in the last few verses of St Matthew's gospel

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

Today we are baptizing Reginald John Alston and we are delighted that he will be brought up to obey the orders of the Lord Jesus Christ, Commander in Chief of the entire world.

[On whose authority?](#)

As we attempt to make sense of the plethora of voices and opinions that flood our airwaves and networks, can we begin to be aware who exactly is guiding our thinking and our choices. The more we learn what the bible teaches about issues of politics, lifestyle, economics – the more we will adopt the mind of Christ and be less swayed by the impressive speeches, personal insults and fear mongering we have heard all too often in public life. Our mindset can be trained to see things God's way.

May we be so obedient to the authority of God, with Jesus as our mentor in our lives that our faith points others to the kingdom of God and so achieves the mandate to help

others become disciples and be baptised in the name of the Father and of the son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen