

Just who do you think you are? Have you ever asked that question?
It is a question we ask of someone getting too big for his britches;
someone behaving with some sense of entitlement.
I'm saving it for some later years in my parenting, years that are coming all too soon.
I remember my parents asking similar questions of me,
when I was less inclined to accept their authority,
when I was acting less like their child than their peer,
before they were ready to see me as such.
Just who do you think you are?

We could ask it of anyone getting out of place in our carefully-arranged world.
A preacher might ask it of a troublesome parishioner.
One of our lordly bishops might have asked it of priest, who asked too many questions.
Or a principal of a critical teacher, undermining the administration.
“Just who do you think you are” is another way of asking the question the chief priests and elders
asked of Jesus.
“By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave it to you?”

The background to their question is the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem that we remember on Palm
Sunday.
He was welcomed with hosannas and palms of victory and cloaks cast down before him.
People hailed him as Messiah and King, the one who had come in the name of the Lord.
The priests and elders didn't like it, such a welcome for an untrained,
unconnected rabbi from the provinces.
And then he went to the Temple and made a ruckus, criticizing the well-established system there
for offering animal sacrifices, for a fee, to God
And turning over tables and sending the moneychangers packing.
“By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave it to you?”
Just who do you think you are?

These chief priests and elders were men who could trace their priestly lineage back multiple
generations.
Their families had stayed near the Temple, near the monarchy, and near Roman authority for a
long time.
They were like all aristocracies, careful to preserve their position, concerned about the distinctions
that set them apart from others.
They didn't know Jesus' family, had heard some rumors about his parents' marriage, didn't think
anything significant ever happened in Nazareth.
This is how the aristocracies of Manhattan or Boston, if they still persist, think about us, down
here in the provinces that provided them with cotton, now with timber.
They do not expect the next great thinker or leader to arise among us.

Though our hierarchies now are less those of lineage than of credential.

It is the degrees you get, the money you make, and the people you get connected to that give you authority in our wider world these days.

We sense authority in those things, which is no improvement.

It is the substitution of one kind of hierarchy for another, for degrees and professional attainment are passed from generation to generation as surely as priestly status was.

We have found many ways of distributing authority in the history of our fallen world;

All basically the same; that those who manage to get power, try to keep it, and would like to give it to their children or their favored successors.

It is natural, it is human; the baboons in their troops and the wolves in their packs try to do the same.

But the coming of Jesus into the world signaled a different mode of authority.

It is significant that God chose a simple man from Galilee, not a priest of the Temple, not a ruler of Israel, in whom to dwell.

He chose one of no earthly authority to manifest all divine power in.

So be careful that you not be too quick to trust those who are credentialed and expected to lead.

The man with the degree, vestments, and microphone might not be the one chosen to reveal the word of God among you!

Sometimes the Word may be heard through the quiet man who loves and serves

Or through the poor woman challenges and demands

Maybe a child who expresses dismay at the injustice that jaded grown-up have long accepted.

The coming of God in Jesus of Nazareth must change our expectations of authority.

For no one thought he was who he was, except the poor to whom he brought good news, the sick whom he healed,

the cast off who he claimed and lifted up.

They were the ones who knew that the authority of God, divine power was at work in him.

The tax collectors and prostitutes believed in John and in Jesus before anyone else did.

An authentic authority is what we are looking for, for one who is who he think he is.

We trust those who prove to be trustworthy; we place some part of our lives in the control of those who seem capable of bearing the burden of our trust, of treasuring the lives in their care.

In the terms of Jesus' parable, a third son is needed,

One whose speech and action are conformed to one another.

We need priests and lay leaders in the church who manifest such authentic, thorough discipleship.

We need mayors, superintendents, and presidents who are who they think they are.

To each other, in our every relationship, we need a thorough loyalty and love.

And we need and have one such as our savior; Jesus Christ.

He thought he was the Son of God, and he was.

He thought he was sent to reveal the Kingdom and love of God, and he did.

And when the cost of all that became clear,

when the lengths that others would go to deny his identity was revealed,

on he walked in full integrity

He was, he is, who he thought he was; humble and obedient to the point of death, even death on the Cross.

By his Spirit, we can live with the same authenticity;

we can be who we think we are, in all humility and thus share in his power.