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"Have You Come to Destroy Us?" The Rev. Garrett Lane (01/28/2024, Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany)

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Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. There are some activities that require a specific type of music, a specific genre of music. And for my family on Saturdays when we were cleaning the house, that genre tended to be, if my mother was in charge, head banging 80s rock. Yes. Head banging and cleaning do go together, try it. In preaching this sermon for the other, the 9 o'clock and the 7 30 I've learned about everyone else's cleaning genres they listen to, from Abba to Lil Wayne and everything in between. So yeah, my parents know all the lyrics to these rock songs in the early 80s. And it's a little before my time. But these bits of these songs live on in me and I recognize them and most of them are now relegated to a playlist on my Spotify account, titled Older. So I'm sorry, but it's not my music. I can't claim it. But I have a lot of really good memories of seeing this with my brothers and got two younger brothers and my mom and dad. And the rebel spirit that embodies so many of these rock songs was a little unnecessary in our home with three boys running around. But there was a song that sticks out to me, the 1984 single released by Twisted Sister. We're not going to take it. Yes, I see some nodding. Yeah, this fierce independence, this spirit of rebellion, it's been used by all sorts of people, all sorts of organizations to tell other people that they're not going to

take it, that they are going to do what they want to do. And my brothers and I never really listened that close we like seeing along, but it was a good time or could have been a good time to throw down our brooms or never do the baseboards again or that kind of thing. But we didn't take up on that. But this first verse, I want to read it to you. We've got the right to choose and there ain't no way we'll lose it. This is our life. This is our song. We'll fight the powers that be. Just don't pick on our destiny, because you don't know us. You don't belong. And the chorus, we're not going to take it. No, we ain't going to take it. We're not going to take it anymore. Yeah. So the parents music resource center, gross, singled out this song with 15 other songs a year later in 1985. They had these, this list of songs that really they thought was quite inappropriate for young minds. And this was on the list. And this group eventually pressured the music industry so much that the little black parental advisory stickers that you see on album covers came from their efforts. And for me, growing up in the late 90s, early 2000s, when I saw this sticker, I was like, I want that. That was kind of how it ended up working out, which I think is kind of funny. But that's a digression. But this song, we're not going to take it. 40 years old now still has much to say about how people think about capital A authority. Authority. You can fight it. It can't ever be good. Authority equals the man might equal the police, big brother, etc. All of these ways in which authority and pop culture, especially in these rock songs, authority is not a good thing. It is something to be resisted. And our views on authority tend to be wrapped up in how we think about authority. And honestly, it's what we expect authority to do. If you, if authority is cracking down on you, you might feel some pressure to resist. If authority is though, is on my side, and I benefit from the authority placed on me or the authority with other people that are going to help me, I might be more apt to not resist this authority. People don't know in the gospel of Mark what to expect when Jesus first shows up. He is the Son of God, but where does he get his power from? The question that gets asked twice in this reading where we hear is by what authority is he doing these things? This gospel, the gospel of Mark is our oldest gospel that we have in the

Bible of Jesus. And it establishes his authority in the first chapter of him as the Son of God. And all throughout the beginning of chapter one, and in verse one, chapter one, it begins by saying the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and everything follows from there. It is answering the question of who is this Jesus? What does it mean that he's the Son of God? And the passage that we heard today read, Jesus has called his disciples, and he's heading into a town. It's the Sabbath, and he goes into a synagogue, and he signs up to teach. And there are other teachers at the synagogue. It would have been normal for the teachers to kind of come through on the Sabbath and teach. And he is immediately recognized for the authority that he has in his teaching, how it is different from the scribes, as Mark says from the scribes, from the people that were well-learned, were knew what they were talking about, could read in different languages, and have their own authority. But Jesus' authority is recognized. It is different from these other teachers. And this man pipes up after he's done teaching. And he has a question for Jesus. And Jesus answers his question and deals with this man with an unclean spirit, speaks to him, sees him, and he heals the man, and his authority is confirmed in his healing. We have Jesus claiming the word and having authority, and the action that follows, and also having an authority as well. So this teaching, this tradition of different teachers, it might be, it would be like if at St. Albans every time Sunday rolled around, Aaron or Garrett or Andrew or Kara would get up and just give a really dense theological opinion or that kind of thing, and then we'd be fighting with each other. So one week, I would just talk about why Andrew was wrong the next week, or something like that, I don't know where he is, but yeah. He's usually right. This new teaching, though, is an authoritative teaching, because it breaks this pattern of giving something intellectual, of giving something that's just words, it's meaningful. It has something to do with the lives of the people that are in the synagogue, and it has something to do with the life of the man with the unclean spirit. And this man, he speaks up in verse 23. He's unclean, so he's not allowed to do a lot in the society at the time, and he's probably

suffering from this unclean spirit. He's in deep pain. And his question that he asks Jesus, is this, are you here to destroy us? It's a question that asks, what kind of authority are you? Can you be trusted? Not competing with other, with the other teachers is what Jesus does, he surpasses what they do. He heals this man, confirms in an action the authority that's granted to him as the Son of God. And Mark points this out. Previous teachers only had words. This word gets followed up on by Jesus' action. But this question that the man asks, with the unclean spirit, is the one that rings out loudest, who are you? Are you here to destroy us? What should I expect from you? We are in many ways like this man with the unclean spirit. When we hear about the authority of Jesus, when we hear about the authority of Jesus, we expect destruction. We expect to be destroyed by what we find in Jesus. But Mark says we are met with healing, we are met with mercy. Jesus has this authority to destroy, but we see he has the authority to teach life. He has the authority to give life. And that's what Mark has offered us today. Christ has the authority to look at me, to look at you, to look at all of us, and say what is loudest in our minds. I'm a failure. I'm out of control in how I'm acting. I can't get my meds straightened out. I'm terribly lonely. I can't say anything right to my children. Christ has the authority to hear all of these things, and as the son of God say, be silent. The authority of the gospel is that God is for you, not against you. The authority of the gospel is that we are healed by Christ, not cut to ribbons by him. The authority of the gospel is that all of us, all of us, are held together here in this church, and we are able to meet Christ in the wine and in the bread when we come together at Eucharist. It's an authority that isn't from some new theological idea or something that's fresh, but it's a very old story. It's the story about God who has created all of humanity and has looked on humanity and has said it's good. You are good, and it invites us, God invites us again and again, to know God. Christ has the authority to look upon us and not want destruction, but wholeness. So often I hear from people that they expect destruction from Jesus. So often they expect

destruction from the church, destruction from a priest or a pastor, and they probably, if they're expecting this, have felt that destruction or judgment or shame from others in the past.

And I see it mostly when I meet people casually. And if any of you are having dinner parties that are upcoming, I encourage you. If you want to totally kill the conversation and invite a priest, invite us to come and just, we'll say to everyone, I'm a priest, hello, and the conversation is dead.

So when I'm at these types of events though, and I meet someone and I tell them what I do,

I work at a church or I'm a clergy person, I get two responses typically. The first response is they immediately confess to me that they haven't been to church in a very long time and they feel so bad, but they're going to go next week and all of these things, this feeling of immediate confession, and I generally am like, I don't really care, but thank you. It's good to meet you.

So that's one response. The second response is that they raise their eyebrows at me as they kind of take a sip of their drink and they look for like the exit signs and maybe pull a fire,

they try to get out of the conversation as quickly as they can. And I think that what this man, upon meeting Jesus, has similar expectations, similar expectations to what we have when we meet people that remind us of Christ, remind us of a Jesus, maybe that might not be the most accurate Jesus, but the one that we know, and we expect destruction, he expects destruction, he expects judgment, he expects fear, he expects trembling, he expects the earth to open up and swallow him because he is this unclean man and he doesn't know who Jesus is. Have you come to destroy us?

This way of thinking about Jesus reminds me of James Cameron's film The Terminator from 1984.

The Terminator Jesus. Right? Arnold Schwarzenegger. Red eyes.

And he comes down, this Terminator. Sarah Connor is the main character played by Linda Hamilton, and she's running from the Terminator. And it's a movie that's been out for a while,

so I'm going to talk about the ending and that's okay. But she eventually gets to this factory and at the end of the film, and she's been running so much from the Terminator that's just been

seeking after her. And every time they think they've destroyed the Terminator, it comes out of flames

or it gets blown up and half of the Terminator is crawling after Sarah

and it's very close to getting her. And the faces that are on these actors as the movie's going on is kind of how I think about this man. It's kind of how I think about our own imaginings of who Jesus is. We expect destruction so often. But there is not destruction in the authority of Christ. That's what Mark is giving us today. There is not destruction in the authority of Christ. He's not sent to seek and destroy us, digging up things from our past, and tossing us out, trying to destroy us. Jesus shows up and he shows this man healing. He shows this man wholeness in the authority of Christ. And that is what so often we don't expect, but we find, especially in liturgical spaces like this, when Aaron later will give us the absolution after we confess our sins. That is the authority of Christ looking at us, looking at who we truly are and meeting us with grace and mercy. Not because Aaron is Jesus, but because the authority that is given to him is from Christ. And that's what we hear in this passage. We are not met with destruction. We are met with a God who sees us, who sees all of us, and everything that we have and meets us with mercy, with grace, and with care. Thanks be to God. Amen.