

Sunday 29th January 2011

10 a.m.

Laurieston Parish Church

Morning Worship

Welcome/Notices

Introit: Majesty (MP 454)

Call to Worship

HYMN 132: Immortal, invisible God only-wise

Talk to the Children

Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

HYMN (JP 169): My God is so big

O.T. Reading: Deuteronomy 18: 14-20 Promised Prophet p. 189

N.T. Reading: Mark 1: 21 - 28 A man with an evil spirit p. 46

Prayer of approach and confession

HYMN 458: At the name of Jesus

Sermon: *God's Authority*

HYMN 500: Lord of Creation, to you be all praise

Offering

Choir Voluntary: Jesus is Lord (MP 367)

Prayer of dedication, thanksgiving & intercession

HYMN 129: The Lord is King

Benediction & Sung Amen

## Welcome/Notices

### Call to Worship/Introit:

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Majesty (MP 454)

The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: he always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had and took the nature of a servant.

**Majesty, worship his Majesty;  
unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom, authority,  
flows from His throne unto His own,  
His anthem raise.  
So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,  
magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.  
Majesty, worship his Majesty,  
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.**

He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

**Majesty, worship his Majesty;  
unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom, authority,  
flows from His throne unto His own,  
His anthem raise.  
So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,  
magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.  
Majesty, worship his Majesty,  
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.**

And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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**Call to Worship:**

So bearing in mind that what we know of God is forever coloured and changed by what we see of him in Jesus, let us worship the immortal, invisible, only-wise God as we sing our opening hymn:

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**HYMN 132:** Immortal, invisible God only-wise

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**Talk to the Children**

- ◆ have them sitting in 'boat'; going out fishing
- ◆ row to the centre of the lake;
- ◆ Jesus very tired after preaching and healing;
- ◆ goes to sleep at the back of the boat; head on pillow
- ◆ waves get rougher; getting seasick; boat fills with water
- ◆ storm gets worse and worse; start getting really scared
- ◆ Jesus is still sleeping; how can he? Should we wake him?
- ◆ Finally, terrified, wake him up:  
    **"Don't you care that we're going to die"**
- ◆ He stands up, tells wind **"Be quiet"**; waves **"Be still"**
- ◆ the storm dies down; everything is completely calm
- ◆ He turns to the disciples and says:  
    **Why are you so frightened? Have you still go no faith?"**
- ◆ all amazed; more frightened than ever:  
    **"Who is this man? Even the wind and waves obey him."**

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**LET US PRAY:**

God, we never met Jesus; never saw his face or heard his voice; and so we sometimes forget just how amazing he was, and how scary he could be sometimes. Just like we sometimes forget how great and powerful you are. But that shouldn't make us frightened, because as well as being strong and mighty, you love us; and so all your power is there to help us and protect us, if we will trust ourselves to you. Help us to do that early on in our lives, and listen to us now as we say together the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses (*debts*)

as we forgive those who trespass against us. (*our debtors*)

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. AMEN

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**HYMN (JP 169):**

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing that he cannot do.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing that he cannot do.

**The mountains are his, the rivers are his,  
the stars are his handiwork too.**

**My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing that he cannot do.**

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing that he cannot do.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing that he cannot do.

**He's called you to live for him every day  
in all that you say and you do.  
My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
and he can do all things through you.**

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**O.T. Reading:** Deuteronomy 18: 14-20 Promised Prophet p. 189  
Then Moses said, "In the land you are about to occupy, people follow the advice of those who practice divination and look for omens, but the Lord your God does not allow you to do this. Instead, he will send you a prophet like me from among your own people, and you are to obey him. "On the day that you were gathered at Mount Sinai, you begged not to hear the Lord speak again or to see his fiery presence any more, because you were afraid you would die. So the Lord said to me, "They have made a wise request. I will send them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will tell him what to say, and he will tell the people everything I command. He will speak in my name, and I will punish anyone who refuses to obey him. But if any prophet dares to speak a message in my name when I did not command him to do so, he must die for it, and so must any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods."

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**N.T. Reading:** Mark 1: 21 - 28 A man with an evil spirit p. 46  
Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority. Just then a man with an evil spirit came into the synagogue and screamed, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are - you are God's holy messenger!" Jesus ordered the spirit, "Be quiet, and come out of the man!" The evil spirit shook the man

hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. The people were all so amazed that they started saying to one another, "What is this? Is it some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!" And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the province of Galilee.

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**LET US PRAY:**

Our God, we can only hear distant echoes down the centuries of that voice that spoke with such authority that storms, and evil spirits were quelled, and human beings were awed, amazed and fearful. We can only imagine what it must have been like to be there in the synagogue listening, as Jesus spoke; watching, as he took command of a situation that no-one else knew how to deal with. And we cannot know if we would have been among those who gave up all that they had to follow him, and find out more; or among the many more who wanted nothing to do with him... who dismissed him as the carpenter's son; threatened him; and ultimately put him to death.

What we do know is that Jesus is here with us still, in a different way, through the Spirit who was his parting gift to his friends; and that he still makes demands on our lives that we are sometimes fearful to accept. To forgive others - as often, as thoroughly, as unconditionally - as we have been forgiven; to accept others - regardless of who they are; what they believe; how they behave - to love them and welcome them, as he did; to be prepared to give up all that is most precious to us - whatever, and whoever that may be - so that his kingdom has first call upon our lives... all of that is more than we can manage, certainly without your help.

And so we come today, asking forgiveness for past failures; but more importantly asking for the strength that we need; the faith that we lack; the grace that will make it possible for us to be true disciples from now on.

When there is a clash between what we want and what we know you want of us, help us to accept your authority and do your will; when we are not sure what you want of us, remind us to ask, and to listen for the answer, however surprising it may be. When we are stuck in our own hurts and fears and anxieties, set us free to live, as you want us to, life that is full, and rich and generous.

So may we be faithful to Jesus Christ your son, worthy successors to your faithful, fallible saints of the past; able to represent you in our world today, and to draw others to you, not by the words that we say but by the sort of people who, by your grace, we are becoming, growing more like Christ every day.

And to him, with you, our Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and worship, all authority and honour, now and for ever more.  
AMEN.

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**HYMN 458:** At the name of Jesus

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**Sermon:** *God's Authority*  
*Isabelle McMillan*

Every time we lift a newspaper or switch on the television we learn of conflict between Government authorities. The Scottish Government says one thing, the authorities in Westminster another. Today my theme is about **God's** authority which is the most important authority of all. His authority is the highest

authority; it surpasses all other authority and it is incomparable with all other authorities because it comes from God and not from man or woman.

The passage we read from Deuteronomy is set at a time when surrounding nations used omens and spells to detect, predict and influence the will of their Gods. In this passage we see these practices utterly rejected.

The people had already witnessed Moses receiving the ten commandments from God and they had been absolutely terrified. It is difficult for us to imagine how frightened they must have been. They certainly didn't want God to communicate with them again that way. We may wonder, too, how the people felt about God after this encounter. Was it just fear and fear alone that they experienced, or did they move on from their terror to genuine respect for God's authority, and for Moses, whom they recognised as speaking to them on God's behalf?

God gave the message to Moses to tell them about the prophet that would come. We don't know who Moses had in mind, but when the early Christians read this passage, they interpreted it, like many others, as foretelling the coming of Jesus. Moses accepted God's authority and was obedient to him, passing on a message that was significant in one way to people in his own time, and in a different way to us now. The prophet that God was going to send would speak with authority and God would tell the prophet what to say.

This makes us think about how God speaks to us today. We may be looking for an answer to prayer and we feel within ourselves that He is speaking to us. Thoughts or ideas may come to us when

we least expect it, and we feel we have to take action. A passage from the Bible, or a word from a sermon may leap out as speaking directly to us and our situation. Or perhaps God has used another person as an instrument in His hands to speak to us, just as He did with Moses. But we need to be careful when we are listening for God's voice or praying for things that we want in case we then convince ourselves that something is God's will, when really it is what we ourselves want.

When we look at our New Testament reading, we see Moses' message being fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Jesus spoke and taught with authority unlike any that has been known before or since.

How do we picture this scene? Would it be the tone of His voice, His body language, or because He was Jesus that His authority was recognised above all others? It is hard for us in the 21st century to think in terms of demons being cast out of a fellow human being. Perhaps this person was having an epileptic fit or suffering from a type of mental illness and was healed by Jesus. That doesn't matter. What matters is the impact the incident had on the people who were there at the time, and continues to have, through them, on us today.

John the Baptist was one of the first to recognise the unique authority of Jesus when he said: *'The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie His sandals.'*

Knowledge of Jesus and his teaching spread throughout Galilee and people had the choice of living under His authority or not. We can imagine how some people may have responded. There would

have been jealousy, and gossip: *'Isn't that the carpenter's son?'* In today's world it might be heard like this: *'Did you know about so and so's son? Walking around everywhere teaching and preaching! I can remember him when he was young, running around in tatty clothes. Who does **he** think he is?'*

We know from other passages that Jesus' authority was not accepted by everyone, and that really shouldn't surprise us. It is hard enough to accept authority when it comes from someone in a position of power - a parent, or a teacher, a police officer or a government official - but Jesus had no such formal authority. His authority was of a different kind altogether, one that was recognised by those whom he described as 'the poor in spirit' - those to whom the kingdom of heaven belonged.

In modern day living, there are certain authorities we have to accept if society is to function. I mentioned earlier government authorities. We have to pay our council tax or rent to the local council; our mortgage fees to the bank. Here in church we operate under the structures of the Church of Scotland, and as a congregation have to accept the authority of presbytery and General Assembly. Sometimes we are the ones who hold positions of authority e.g. manager of a shop or office and we are given the authority to instruct others, but there is always the danger of power and authority being abused. When legitimate authority changes into bullying, it can lead to an atmosphere of discontent, fear, illness and poor standards of work caused by stress. Some of us may describe our school days as being *'the happiest days of our lives'* when we were under the authority of kindly teachers, whilst others may recall teachers who abused their position of authority by readily using their power to inflict corporal punishment for very minor incidents.

Even within the animal kingdom, there is a position of authority; there will be one animal in a herd or pack who is the leader.

What happens when rightful authority is not adhered to? We see examples of this in parenting, where adults who have probably been poorly parented themselves have no idea how to discipline their children. Instead of showing authority, the parent treats the child more like a pal, and that leads to insecurity, lack of respect and chaotic behaviour.

Hitler was elected to power, but he used his legitimate authority for the most extreme form of dictatorship. In more recent times we have had Gaddafi and others abusing their positions of power. At the other extreme, we have someone like Nelson Mandela earning the love and respect of his people, and using his position of authority for the good of others. And the same patterns and choices can be seen at every level of society, wherever people live and work together.

Authority should, as a general rule, be respected. However, respect has to be earned. This brings us back to God's authority. He does not need to earn our respect because He is our creator; but nor does he force his power upon us. The invitation is there; the call to discipleship and service; the authority that we recognise in the deepest part of our being - but it is always up to us whether and how we respond.

So how do we accept the authority of God in our lives? Individuals are at very different stages in their Christian lives. Some people have maybe just joined the church and are enthusiastically reading God's word and are awed by what He is doing for them. Others perhaps have been on their Christian journey for many years and their acceptance of God's authority has become steady,

less dramatic but stronger. For others, God's authority may have become a bit distant, because life's troubles have got the better of them and they have drawn away from Him.

Whatever stage a person has reached, it is helpful to remind ourselves that as Christians, we have put ourselves under God's authority by our own free choice. But what does this mean in practice? The more we get to know His word, the more we learn what He wants from us. The more we build up a relationship with Him, the more we love Him and with that love comes respect, and so we want to be obedient to Him and live a life that is acceptable to Him.

Sometimes when life gets hard, we may feel we want to rebel, but those of us who have tried to live outwith God's authority realise that God exercises His authority over us in love, not to domineer or rule over people like a dictator, but to lead us into a better way of life.

Non-believers have been heard to say that being a Christian is living a life with a long list of **don'ts**. Where do they get this idea from? Is it something we have said or done? Do we actually believe this ourselves? Or is it just a myth that has been passed down from generation to generation?

Those of us who have come to know God through Christ know that living under God's authority is **NOT** a list of **don'ts**. It is a **better** way of life – not **easier** because we still have to go through difficult times, such as unemployment, illness, depression, loneliness or loss of a loved one. However, we receive an inner strength to carry on, knowing that whatever journey we travel in our lives, we have a God who exercises authority over us with love. We are forgiven; we experience life in all its fullness; it is rewarding; it brings us peace and gives us promise for the future.

We have looked at how Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus accepted God’s authority. How do we do this? Do we confidently approach God in prayer? Do we regularly read His word, not because we feel we have to, but because we want to? What do we do with the bits we find difficult to understand? There are many books and commentaries that can help us. Do we follow His teaching to love one another? Or do we hold back because we think it is too difficult? Do we think we are not good enough and that we cannot be forgiven?

Living under God’s authority is not **oppressive** but **liberating**. It sets us free to live a full life in union with Him. Missionaries and aid workers go into foreign countries and work in difficult and dangerous situations. It could be said that living under such conditions is **oppressive** but for the person who knows that this is what they are called to do, it is also **liberating** because they are willingly restricting their freedom to do good for others. The same could be said of the many people in our own country who volunteer in various community projects. They are giving up the freedom to relax, as other people do, in their leisure time, but they do so willingly, and discover how liberating it can be, when they experience the joy of helping others and learning new skills.

Living under God’s authority is not **OPPRESSIVE** but **LIBERATING!**  
May God bless us all as a congregation and as individuals as we seek to live under God’s authority.      AMEN

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**HYMN 500:**      Lord of Creation, to you be all praise

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**Offering**

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**Choir Voluntary:**

(MP 367)

**Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,  
for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made.  
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it.  
Sun, moon and stars in heaven cry Jesus is Lord!  
*Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!*  
*Praise him with alleluias for Jesus is Lord!***

**Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal  
in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.  
Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding,  
yet gave his life a ransom thus setting us free.  
*Chorus***

**Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,  
from death he rose and all his foes shall own his name.  
Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit  
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.  
*Chorus***

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**LET US PRAY:**

God, we thank you for clear guidance and structure in a world in which so much is uncertain: In a universe which sometimes seems random and uncaring, we believe that you are its source, its sustainer and its ultimate goal. At the heart of all that is, within it and beyond it, within us and far beyond us too, is the God who is Love, and if that is any way true, then there is nothing for us to fear.

Loving God, we pray for any who are fearful, including those who have pictures in their minds of a very different god from the one whom Jesus called his Father: a God who makes impossible

demands of us, so that he can punish us when we fail. Lord, if we have been responsible for any of those distorted images of you, if we hold them in our own minds, help us look again at Jesus and see that compelling authority that does not force itself on anyone, but draws people to himself by the power of love.

We pray for those who hold positions of authority in our world. For politicians, and company directors; for teachers and parents; for bankers and economists... especially for those who struggle to exercise their power in a responsible, compassionate way in a culture where the opposite is the norm.

We pray for those who suffer under harsh regimes: for dissidents in countries where no protest is tolerated; for people with no economic clout in an age where money seems to rule over all.

We pray for parents, who had no clear guidance from their own parents when they were growing up, and have no idea how to discipline their children or to give them the clear boundaries they need. And for teachers and youth leaders, trying somehow to bring some order into the chaos of their lives.

We pray for those who are fearful and uncertain, not through anyone's fault, but because of the storms and trials that life inevitably brings, and because they either have no faith to turn to, or a faith that has not grown up as they did. Reach out to them, we pray, with your arms of love; call out to them in a voice that cannot be ignored; and may they know that whatever life may bring, you are with them - they are not alone.

Loving God, we give thanks for the privilege that is ours of knowing your love for us in Christ. May we be faithful to his calling; open to his challenge; filled with his spirit of grace and

power, so that we may share with others the blessings we have received.

We offer these gifts as a sign of our glad acceptance of your authority in our lives: giving up our freedom, as the world would see it, in order that we may be truly free, in Jesus' name and by his spirit's power. AMEN

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**HYMN 129:**    The Lord is King

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**Benediction:**  
**Now to him who is able, through the power at work among us,  
to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine;  
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus  
from generation to generation for evermore.**

**Go in his peace and his power, and may the blessing...**

**Sung Amen**  
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