

Tell me, do still have that voice somewhere in the back of your head? That voice that comes front and center every now and then?

Whenever I went to visit someone at the Bradley home, just before the entrance there is a sign that reads; "Please wipe your feet"! It is then that I would hear the voice of my mother saying, "Alden wipe your feet." My mother was a teacher and as her son her pupil she was my teacher growing up.

When I would make two trips because I forgot something, my father would say, "Alden use your brains and save your heals."

There words and expressions are still teaching me, still part of my DNA!

Yes words from our parents, our teachers for good or for ill are and were very influential in our development. Each of these are expressions of authority-the authority over a child. My wife Helen will tell you that when she and her sister would go to church with their mother, their mother did not use words she had to do was give them, "the look". You know the look! This is worship you are to be quiet!

Authority- I remember when I was in grammar school I was chosen to be a patrol Boy. I was given a badge and a white belt with a strap that when down across my chest. After lunch before classes would start, I had the authority to step off the curb, stop traffic and tell my class mates that it was safe to cross the street. As I remember it my authority did not go to my head. Some other guys, well it did go to tier heads and they were the bullies in the class. Some I think may be just grow up but still bullies!

Sometimes we are given authority over someone or something, without even being ask to have it. After my active duty in the Army I was assigned to a teaching unit in Fairfield. That summer we went to Fort Dix to teach and train new recruits for some two weeks. Now I was trained to be a company clerk, my skill was typing, keeping records, very boring, I was not a teacher, until I was TOLD that the next day I would be teaching period three of army drill to not one but two companies of recruits.

My first thought was how can get out of this? Should I get sick, go AWOL? Well that was not an option. Thankfully a regular Army SSGT "had compassion' on me and lent me his army manual his book on army drill. I read and read it that evening all about period three of army drill. WELL that next afternoon at 1300 hours, that 1 pm for you civilians here I was standing on top of a wooden platform some 20-25 high with a clip board, and a mike around my neck.

The 200-400 recruits were standing in horse shoe formation at attention at my feet. The SSgt gave me a salute and I began to speak using "my command voice". "Good afternoon men, my name is Corporal Barnes of the Pioneer Training Regiment. This is period three of army drill. I will teach you and you will see demonstrated the following... I had been given the authority to teach and with the help of others to train these new recruits how to march.

Today's scriptures are about authority and power. The Old Testament lets us read that God will raise up a prophet like Moses- who will be given he authority to speak his word and so lead the people in righteousness.

The gospel reading also deals with the authority that Jesus held. An authority that allowed Jesus to command evil to depart and to teach in a manner unlike that of the scribes and Pharisees. We are invited to go inside the synagogue at Capernaum where Jesus is teaching, preaching. He is sitting down in the Moses seat, which was the custom. We do not have the words of this sermon, but as Jesus was speaking, we see a man who interrupts Jesus and yells out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.

Since this man was already in the synagogue, I wonder if the religious leaders had seen him before, screaming nonsense, and just kept on teaching-rather than trying to determine what was keeping this man in such a state. The people around this man surely knew what he needed. Demon possession is pretty obvious stuff. Those who are possessed are no longer in control of themselves.

They may even have said to one another - "it's too bad about that poor guy - someone should do something about it". And that someone who had the authority did! "Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

That's what keeps Jesus' audience in awe and wonder. This teaching is a new way in which he is teaching with compassion. WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A NEW TEACHING ONE WITH UNDERSTANDING AND MOST OF ALL ONE WITH COMPASSION.

Her name was Selma a young woman in her early forties but who was mentally challenged. At time in worship she made a fuss, talked out loud, it disturbed a lot of the folks. Each communion Sunday Selma was not able to attend worship. She had a small job at a Catholic school for girls. After worship I would bring her communion.

When we prayed together she would told my hands sneeze them and weep. At times she would cry out. I asked some folks what they thought was her problem, her demon so to speak. "Oh! She been that was for years since her mother died, she just a broken record, pay no attention, but then I did pay attention and listened.

Selma told me that her mother died some twelve years ago in December. Since it was winter, bodies were not buried, but placed in a vault until spring. Selma told me that at the service the minister did not say the words. In her mind the prayer of committal did not register with her, and so I determined that for twelve years this troubled woman was still in grief. What could I do to help her?

Well that spring I took Selma back to the cemetery to her mother grave, She had never been there! We knell down together and I said the words of the prayer of committal. Followed by the Lord's Prayer. As I helped her up she had a wonderful smile, and tears of joy. At last the minister said the words. Like that troubled man in the worship service Selma was healed set free. Now she could begin again.

My friends, we need then to pay attention to listen even to those who make us uncomfortable. Those who are often ignored the marginalized, those who are called OTHERS”. In our Baptism Covenant ritual this question is asked; of those who take the vows to care for and nurture the child being presented for Baptism: It is our question as well “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? How will you answer? May we all together say, WE DO!

Go therefore as Christ disciples and take the authority you have been given to stand up for Jesus to speak up with love and compassion of Jesus this day and forever more. Amen.