

Social disruption! Riots in the streets! Crowds gathering, unruly crowds coming together for no apparent reason. Call in the guard. No don't call in the guard, people will get hurt, the authorities will crack down on us all. What kinds of criminals are causing this ruckus? Who's behind it all? Revolutionaries with no respect for law and order.

Huh.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Except that this disruption was taking place 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem. Jesus had just ridden into town on the back of a donkey to the adulation of the crowds. People had been pouring into the city of Jerusalem making the authorities nervous, even more so as they realized that this fuss was over a peasant who was upsetting the Jewish religious authorities. Then he had the nerve to go into the temple and without any warning had take a whip to those who were buying and selling as well as the money changers in the temple crying "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers." (Matt 21:13)

We need money changers in the temple or how else are people going to pay their temple taxes? Feathers flying animals mooing, screaming, barking, squawking, what a mess!

And here he is back again, curing the blind and the lame. What's he saying now: Who does he think he is, a prophet? We know about those prophets, they threaten death and destruction, they advocate for the poor, the widows, the sick. These parables, bah! Who can understand them? They make no sense. We have a city to run, an empire to placate. We don't have time for this. Do you want to see crosses lining the roads to Jerusalem? We all need to get along and stop resisting.

Right. We need to stop this, we need to stop this now and go back to normalcy, we need to restore order and get the rest of these peasants out of the city.

We need to talk to this Jesus!

Finally the chief priests and the elders approach Jesus while he was teaching and ask him "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"(Matt 23:21) That is the question, the \$20,000 question, isn't it? How dare this unknown upstart turn the world upside down?

As Christians we understand the authority by which and through which Jesus was doing these things but we can also appreciate that others at the time might not have understood or accepted what he was saying – it was coming from an unlikely source.

Jesus response is anything but conciliatory. He aligns himself with John the Baptist, another controversial figure. His refusal to tell them directly about the sources of his authority – not that they would have believed him if he had...and his statement about the prostitutes and tax collectors were not likely to help matters.

But let's step back a minute. By what authority was Jesus able to do these things? He was human; he didn't think of himself as God, he always pointed directly to God as the source of all. So how did he do these things?

The answer, or at least one answer, lies in our reading from Philippians when we hear that ancient but still powerful hymn.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:5-8)

There you have it. Jesus' authority, Jesus' power came from emptying himself of anything except being obedient to the will of God. Instead of turning him into a zombie he was filled with power that most mortals, if not no mortals will ever experience. The word we use to describe this self-emptying is kenosis.

Kenosis or self-emptying is one way of explaining what Jesus had to do in order to not have his divine and nature overshadow his humanity. It's one thing to proclaim, as we do in the Nicene creed, that Jesus is the son of God, eternally begotten of the Father and that he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary but it's another thing altogether to try to explain how that actually worked. One person, 2 natures ...there's a long list of heresies that try to do just that and either end up denying Jesus' full humanity, and or his equality with the Father. Therefore we will leave more detailed explanations up to the theologians. It is worth noting however that many theologians see kenosis as the very essence of the nature of God, the God who is three-in-one, whose relational energy as the Holy Trinity creates, redeems, and sanctifies out of love for creation. That love involves letting go as God let go when we were gifted with free-will ... even when that leads to suffering.

As Christians we know that Jesus as both man and God. It's like how the bread and the wine become Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist. We don't profess the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation which is based on medieval metaphysics, and we don't even try to explain it, we just know that something does indeed happen and when we are fed we are the better for it. Nevertheless Jesus' full humanity is important because, as the Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus once said, “That which has not been assumed has not been redeemed.” It

was Jesus' ultimate act of self-emptying in dying on the cross that becomes the basis for our salvation.

But even though kenosis is a way of understanding Jesus' nature and power it still has application for us as followers of Jesus. We can't ignore what self-emptying means even though it is so antithetical to our human way of thinking. Instead of unconditional obedience we accept obedience as a way to control our impulses that run amok in our pursuit of power, fame, and money, or whichever of the seven deadly sins is most tempting. We have difficulty accepting that the power of God comes from letting go. Letting go for God does not make us pushovers. Jesus demonstrates that fully in his challenge to the temple authorities where he pulls no punches and manages to upend an empire.

We have seen God's power reflected in the lives of this in some of our saints, who while not perfect were able to set aside enough of their humanity to be filled with God's inexplicable grace in following God's will. Martin Luther King Jr, or Joan of Arc, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer. None died gentle deaths but all accomplished much for the sake of the kingdom and whose influence after their death continued to be powerful.

To be filled with the power of God, to be fulfilled in the pursuit of God's will is to bring joy, and strength, and courage even in the midst of suffering and death. Such fulfillment is beyond our earthly definition of satisfaction.

Paul counsels his listener to "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling both to will and work for his good pleasure. (Phil 2:5, 13)

Paul is not telling them or us to emulate Jesus Christ for that is beyond our ability. Nevertheless he is reminding his listeners that through baptism God is at work in them, as God is at work in us for we have been "buried with Christ in his death and share in his resurrection and have been reborn by the Holy Spirit. We are a new being. And we can trust that full and unconditional obedience God will enable us to delight in his will and walk in his ways.

Amen.