A couple of weeks ago I cooked a spaghetti squash. Probably everyone here knows about this except me. But I had never cooked a spaghetti squash, and I didn’t even know they existed. In other words, the whole experience was brand new. But the truly amazing thing was not that there was such a thing as a spaghetti squash, butwhat happened after I cooked the spaghetti squash. I was being coached on how to do this and after 50 minutes of the spaghetti squash cooking at 425, I took it out of the oven. And the instructions were to take a fork and just start scraping the top of the spaghetti squash. And I haven’t been surpised like that in a long, long time. The squash just turned into spaghetti as I scraped it with my fork. I just could believe it. I had no idea. This was entirely brand new.

This is what we are talking about today in our lessons I think. We have here today something brand new that people had not experienced before. That’s what Jesus brings today. And this is related to two realities that we are always dealing with. One is knowledge, what think I know. What I’ve learned. And the other is authority. Which is what I choose to follow. Jesus does something brand new. And what it is, is clear in the text. It’s a new understanding of knowledge and authority. And it’s still surprising I think after all these years.

What comes into your head when I say the word “authority?” Or here come the authorities? My guess is that you and I aren’t that much different from the people of Jesus day. The authorities are understood to be people who have one of two things. One is power. So the authorities would be people like policemen or some from of the law who can force obedience. Parents, teachers. Basically the authority of the law. And the other form of authority that probably comes to mind is the authority of knowledge. So and so is an authority on this subject. Which means they have a lot of knowledge and expertise in that particular field. So if your teeth hurt you look to the dentist as an authority because they have knowledge. So authority is usually understand as the authority of the law, or the authorty of some kind of expertise. Authority implies hierarchy for most of us. Top down and the higher you are on the ladder the more authority you have.

There is always under an authority that claims to know. You can’t get out of it. We might think that we’re our own authority, but I don’t think that’s true. We following something that we grant authority to all the time. And it might not be what we usually think of as the authorities, but we’re still following some kind of authority. We could be for example under the authority of how were raised. We can be under the authority of our children. We can be under the authority of what will the neighbors think. We could be under the authority of our desires and wants. Some people might be under the authority of their group of friends. But no matter what, you are disciple of someone or something that you believe has knowledge. You are under some kind of authority all the time. There is no escaping authority.

We live in a culture right now though that doesn’t believe this I think. So the result is that we have a lot of people who have a real problem with authority, and a real problem with people who claim to know. Take the simple subject of masks again. This is really interesting regarding authority and knowledge. A mask mandate creates like an uproar. People do not want to be told to do. And since knowledge gives authority currently just about every form of knowledge gets discredited and discounted. Oh they don’t anything. The police, the church, the government, the scientists. All discredited. Because to grant that they had knowledge would give them authority.

But no matter, we will be under some kind of authority and some kind of knowledge. And so in the place of the authorities, a differnt kind of authority and knowledge is emerging. It’s inevitable. And in our Gospel lesson today we see it in the form of the unclean spirit that Jesus has to cast out. Listen to it, and perhaps you will recognize it as a powerful voice in our culture, maybe it’s most powerful voice right now. “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazaruth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, you are Holy One of God. Do you see the knowledge and the authority? In the place of the authorities of our past another authority is coming to be the most powerful. And it is the power of labelling people. It is the authority of putting you in a little box. I know who you are. I have knowledge and I have authority because I can label you. You’re a socialist, or a racist, or radical leftist, or Christian nationalist, or a xenophobe. Your liberal communist, or a white supremisist. This is the unclean spirit that is infecting our churches. And the same accusation is leveled at every group by every other group. Have you come to destroy us? This seems to be our new form of knowledge that gives us authority in the culture. We’ve been discipled, and we’ve been taught by something or someone that we have chosen to follow. That we’re smart and we have authority if we can put people in a box.

This is almost exactly the same situation that Jesus found himself in when he came to visit us 2100 years ago. Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, zealots, tax collectors, and lepers and all the rest. Everyone was in a little box. So it’s nothing really new. It’s been the same thing for thousands of years. And people became this way because of who they granted authority to, and who they felt had knowledge. Everybody was a disciple of someone. so I do have to ask you this morning. Who are you following? Who are you listening to? Who do you think has knowledge? And is it turning you into this kind of person? Who gets power and authority by putting people in little boxes and calling them names? I don’t know about you, but I do it. Makes me feel like I have knowledge and authority. This sermon is for me.

But the good news today is that there is spaghetti squash. Today in our lesson we have a new authority. An authority that just amazed people. They just couldn’t believe it. And you certainly can’t get the whole picture from our texts this morning. But there are clues in our lessons today. Because the word used for authority here means this, and my guess is that this might be as new to you as spaghetti squash was for me. The word used for authority in Scripture means this: honor acquired through social interaction. Hmm. This new authority that amazed people and cast out the unclean spirit was in the nature of the conversations that Jesus had with people. That’s it. It’s that simple. So authority here is not the authority of force, or law. And it’s not the authority of knowledge as information, or expertise. This authority was simply the way that Jesus talked to people. It was the kind of relationship that he had with the people in this synagogue. Jesus was just with them in a certain way. A way that cast out this need to label people and put them in little boxes and call ‘em names. I think we miss the point if we turn this casting out into some supernatural power that Jesus had that we do not. We are being discipled here. We are being given knowledge of a new kind of authority to us. The knowledge that give us this new authority comes from learning how to have a certain kind of conversation.

Now there are so many ways to go with this, but since my favorite verse in the Bible is in our second lesson today, I’m gong to use that to talk about this new kind of authority and knowledge. So we know kind of what the new authority is, it’s a way of being together. Now we seem some knowledge. So now lets look at a new kind of knowledge. So let’s just start at the beginning here of the second lesson. Now concerning food sacrified to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge. Been saying that all morning. One way or another, even if we label people we’re doing it because we think that knowledge is expertise or information. I know you. But here’s the new knowledge. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge. So the new authority is way of being together. And the new knowledge is that I know I don’t know. The unclean spirit will continue to come in many ways. Oh, I know you. Yeah I know those people. Your that liberal, your that conservative. That Catholic or that Jew. You can follow a lot of people who will disciple you in how to do that. Got you all figured out. What casts out unclean spirit? Oh no you don’t. Don’t label me. Don’t put me in your little box. Why don’t we get to know each other?

I mean this is just perfect. And it’s new every single time. Real knowledge is knowing that you don’t know. You might call this humility. So our authority is that we’re going to be together, knowing that we don’t know. We’re going to be together in way then that says, maybe I can learn something here. Maybe I can get past those labels. Those little boxes that I put people in. Maybe we can cast out the unclean spirit too. A new kind of authority based on a new kind of knowledge. An honor that grows through a conversation that is open to something new.

It’s a big piece of the knowledge and authority that Jesus came to bring. Amen.

Knowledge is related to authority isn’t it? I’ve been getting my teeth fixed. And I’m granting my dentist authority because he has knowledge right? He said after my last visit that my gums were going to hurt for a few weeks. And they did, and they do. He knew. I give him authority because I think he knows. I granted my cooking instructor authority, I followed along because I trusted that she had knowledge that I didn’t have. Definitely turned out to be the case. You might follow what you’re mechanic says when it comes to your car, because you believe that they have knowledge that you don’t have. Knowledge is directly related to authority. The more we think people know, the more we will be willing to grant them authority is that not true? Knowledge and authority go together.

But knowledge and authority can go very wrong. We see this in our Gospel lesson today in the form of a man with an unclean spirit. Yeah, he is under a demonic power of some sort. But look at what it is, it’s right there in the text in what he says. What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazaruth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, you are the Holy one of God. That’s knowledge isn’t it? That’s authority. I know who you are. Sure, you’re a socialist, or racist, or feminist, or leftist,or a fascist, or nationalist, or a white supremist, or a bigot. Yup, I’ve got a label on you. I know. What’s happened to knowledge here, and authority? It’s turning you into literally the devil. The accuser. To stick others in a box. I know who you are. You’re an idiot.

This is the problem that Paul points out in the second lesson when he says, “knowledge puff up, but love builds up”. When I go to the dentist knowledge becomes a way to make me well, to get me better, to lift me up. He wants what is best for me. My cooking instructor wants me to have good meal. Newness. Knowledge and authority is working for life. But knowledge and authority so easily work to bring destruction and division. I know who you are. I know your family. I’ve just got you pegged in your little box. Knowledge and authority all gets twisted into something very ugly.

You can know this, can’t you? I think you can gain knowledge of this. You can gain knowledge of what you grant authority to and why. Who do you listen to for knowledge? who do you follow? We all follow someone. We all grant authority to someone and follow their teachings and model their behavior. All of us are following someone and giving them authority over us. What kind of knowledge do they give you? Does it build people up? Or does it puff you up, so you can label the losers and tear ‘em apart? You can gain knowledge of this. You are following someone. And listening to someone. And granting them authority. What are they teaching you to do? To believe? And most importantly, what kind of person are they turning you into?

It’s really interesting how knowledge and authority come together in Jesus. Knowledge of course in the Bible never refers to head knowledge. What it refers to is knowing a person. So on the surface it’s exactly the same as the knowledge that tears down. I know you. But what’s really different is nature of authority. The word used here for authority refers to social interaction. And that’s completely different than putting a person in a box isn’t it? I know you here refers to just the opposite. Putting a person in a box with a label on it ends the conversation. The authority that is new is an authority that begins the conversation. Authority is an ongoing relationship. The authority that Jesus had that amazed people was the way he talked to them. He didn’t talk to them like the scribes.