Ancient cultures often conferred authority on people based upon their station at birth. A nobleman, for example, would have more authority than a carpenter. That is unless, of course, someone did what Jesus did – not only teaching with authority but also healing a man with an unclean spirit. Such an action challenged their understanding of authority and likely ruffled a few feathers.

So, who do we accept as authorities in our culture? We give power of attorney and medical power of attorney to some of our relatives. That gives them authority to make decisions on our behalf if we are unavailable or too ill to make them ourselves.

What about teachers and professors? Sometimes, we confer authority upon them. Yet we do occasionally see examples of young people or their parents who totally disregard teachers or professors.

Some of us may give authority to a financial adviser to make stock trades for us, while others believe it’s best to trust this task only to ourselves. Some of us may give a certain amount of authority to our boss; others may ignore him or her as much as possible. Some of us may give authority to police officers or other law enforcement officials; others, perhaps do not do so. Finally, some of us give authority to coaches. But then again, how often do we second-guess them; for example, we second-guess the Packers coach for not going for two points after a touchdown. Or let’s consider what parents of a Little League player yell out on the field when the coach doesn’t do what they think he should.

So in our culture, we don’t all agree on who should have authority. We sometimes decide individually who has authority based on our own backgrounds and orientation – for example, those of us who have had good or at least neutral experiences with police are more likely to confer authority on them than those who have had bad experiences. Likewise, those whose parents have told us good things about teachers and police are more likely to grant them authority than those whose parents have told us bad things. We also tend to confer authority based upon whether the person leads in the way we feel they should. We recognize the authority of the Packers coach better when his decisions result in a victory.

God’s authority crosses culture. God, and God’s Son Jesus, are authentic authorities in all times and all places. “Great are the deeds of the Lord!” writes the Psalmist. “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all

things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist,” writes Paul.

Those who heard Jesus teach in that synagogue sensed that his knowledge was way beyond that of a typical carpenter. In fact, they sensed that his knowledge was even greater than that of a scribe who had studied the Scriptures. Of course, Jesus’s knowledge was greater than anyone’s. Jesus was the fulfillment of all Scripture. Jesus was present with and among the people when all the events in the Hebrew Scripture happened.

When Jesus healed the man with the unclean spirit, he demonstrated that not only did he teach the Scriptures with authority, but that He also had authority over evil. Only God could have made that evil spirit come out of that man. Only God can conquer evil.

So, we don’t have Jesus walking around in the Flesh among us today. How do we discern Jesus among us?

The first way is to know the Scriptures ourselves so that when we hear others speak and observe their actions we can see and hear them in light of those Scriptures. Those who speak the truth and act in a Scriptural way are acting under the authority of Jesus. The second way is through our prayer life in connection with the prayer lives of others. Here’s what I mean by that. We pray and an idea comes to us of a new ministry or we receive an idea of something we need to do better. But, we don’t just act on this on our own. Instead, we ask others in our church community if God is telling them the same thing in their prayers. We talk about it, especially through our elected leaders or through those appointed to lead certain ministries. We pray about it together. We search the Scriptures. We decide in community.

We’ve had a tough last few months as individuals and as a community of faithful Christians. Yet God is still in charge. God is still the authority, even though sometimes we may have trouble figuring out where God is in all this. God is at work. God is leading us. We discern where God is leading us through searching the Scriptures, through personal prayer, and through conversation and prayer in community. Once we discern where God is leading, we move forward, recognizing God’s authority.

We may not all agree about the authority of the Packers’ coach or of our child’s teacher or of the police. We are all Christians. As individuals and in a faith community, we are all called to recognize God’s authority.

Where will God’s authority lead us next?