

Back with Mark's gospel this week. In the first chapter of Mark where we are reading this week Jesus just appears and in short sharp breathless scenes he is presented as the Man of Authority. In Mark things are always happening "immediately", "at once" and a sense of urgency pervades the gospel for the Reign of God is even now breaking in and the only sensible response is to "Repent! and believe the Good News".

As Mark often does he gives us a setting for today's action - synagogue on a Sabbath - holy space and holy time. The passage holds a number of the themes that pervade Mark. For instance Jesus is presented as a teacher but we get very little of the actual content of his teaching (unlike Matthew for example). Mark repeatedly indicates that "proclaiming" or "preaching" for Jesus goes beyond words and messages. It includes powerful deeds - his exorcisms, healings, and legal controversies. It involves all the ways in which he makes God's reign (or "kingdom," as traditionally translated) known and observable. This what it means to teach with authority. Not everyone by any means accepted it was from God, but all remarked on it. Who does he think he is? How can he heal/cast out unclean spirit/teach this way. On what authority?

What made Jesus' teaching so different from the scribes? After all, the scribes were experts on the Hebrew Bible. They studied it, memorized it and meditated on it constantly. They were the leading experts of their day. They were the divines, the PhD's of theology, the professors who were well-respected and admired for their knowledge, wisdom and insight of the scriptures. But the teachers of the law didn't speak with their own authority. They prefaced their comments with something like "There is a saying that..." or "Rabbi Such-and-Such said..." But Jesus said simply, "I say to you..." And the people react to Jesus with astonishment and amazement.

When the people heard him teach, they were moved by the power of his teaching. People were moved, diseases healed, demons driven out, the Kingdom of God comes near.

This is a vexed question in our post-modern, fake news, social media oriented, scam vulnerable world where traditional sources of authority have all but collapsed. Authority... what does it look like, who has it, how is it won?

5 minutes in small group discussing who or what holds authority for you

In Mark there is much discussion yet confusion about Jesus' true identity but there is one group who have particular insight - and that is the evil or unclean spirits. They are presented as having intimate knowledge of the spiritual realm and so can name Jesus perhaps as an attempt to gain control over him. These unclean spirits are encroaching upon God's good creation - binding people through disease, illness, death - even a slavish legalistic law adherence could be interpreted as an expression of these malevolent powers. No coincidence this early story is a confrontation. It is the opening skirmish in what is a cosmic apocalyptic battle. In Jesus God is claiming back that which has fallen under the power of evil. Jesus offers no compromise- have you come to destroy us? The unclean spirit says. Yes! There are four exorcisms in Mark's gospel and they are presented as the Man of

Authority striding into this world with the full authority of the Divine in order to throw back the powers that have overstepped their place in creation.

Today's follows on from calling disciples - shows man of authority

In a worldly sense, Jesus did not have any power at all. He was not a worldly king with political or military power. He was not of the priests, who had the power in Roman Judea. He was not even a scribe with the authority of Jewish tradition. The only authority he had was the supreme confidence that what he did and said was God's will and God's truth. His authority lay in the sheer power of his words and in the example of his deeds. His authority lay in his living as God's servant. Jesus used his authority not to obtain power for himself but to serve humanity (Mark 10:41-45). This is the same kind of *exousia*, sovereign freedom, of which Paul speaks in today's second lesson [1 Corinthians 8:9]—sovereign freedom exercised for the good of others.