



Jan. 31, 2021 Mk. 1:21-28. Deut. 18:15-20

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

With Mark's characteristic urgency, we are thrust into the conflict of whose understanding of God is the right one. Obviously, Jesus' teaching impressed the people as being very different that what they got from their other teachers. Immediately the spirit of the status quo recognizes a threat to its dominance and accuses Jesus of trying to destroy it. The people identify the spirit as coming from evil and are amazed at how Jesus had authority over it. It seems like the people had their 'truth detectors' turned on. Now we need to turn ours on as well.

Mk. 1:21-28

21 They went to **Capernaum**, and when the **Sabbath** came, Jesus went into the **synagogue** and began to **teach**. 22 The people were **amazed** at his **teaching**, because he **taught** them as one who had **authority**, not as the **teachers** of the **law**. 23 Just then a man in their **synagogue** who was **possessed** by an **evil spirit** cried out, 24 What do you want with us, **Jesus of Nazareth**? Have you come to **destroy** us? I **know** who you are --the **Holy One of God!**" 25 Be **quiet!**" said Jesus **sternly**. "**Come out** of him!" 26 The **evil spirit** **shook** the man **violently** and **came out** of him with a **shriek**. 27 The people were all so **amazed** that they asked each other, "What is this? A new **teaching**--and with **authority!** He even gives **orders** to **evil spirits** and they **obey** him." 28 **News** about him spread **quickly** over the **whole region** of Galilee.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: The people could identify the source of the evil spirit that day in the synagogue. How do you identify the source of a 'spirit' today?

PRAYER: Lord, I find it hard to question the source of a teaching when it agrees with what I think or want. Yet, you give me a conscience that starts ringing alarm bells when it senses something isn't quite right about something. My mind goes to work on it and finds all kinds of "good" reasons to ignore the bells, but your love keeps the bells ringing. Help me to cherish those alarm bells and heed them. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

CAPERNAUM: (See below) Capernaum became a pivotal place in Jesus' ministry. It provided a place where many ideas and cultures intermixed.

What makes Capernaum a good place for the beginning of Jesus' ministry?

SABBATH: The Sabbath was the holiest day of the week for the Jews. Jesus has just called his disciples. Now he moves immediately to the place the people gathered, to hear the word of the Lord proclaimed and explained.

What do you think Mark is doing by having Jesus teaching on the Sabbath in the synagogue? What do you think the disciples made of this? What about the people in the synagogue?



SYNAGOGUE: The synagogue was the place of study and prayer in the local communities. and no sacrifices were offered there. This was reserved for the temple only.

How would you feel if a stranger from out of town came into your church and began to teach? What if they taught in such a way that you came away impressed with their understanding of God that brought new life into your faith?

TEACH/ER/ING-TAUGHT: A teacher is one who is recognized as one having expertise in an area that you lack. Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught, only that his teaching was very different.

What would it take to get you to sit up and take notice in your teaching about God?

AMAZED: The word amazed implies open-mouthed awe. Something totally unexpected and yet wonder-filled has just happened. *Why do you think people were amazed? Could it be that no one could have expected such wisdom from Jesus of Nazareth? Could it be that the people recognized the potential for official resistance to what Jesus was teaching?*

AUTHORITY: People in Jesus' times believed authority came from two sources, God and the evil one. It was imperative that they be clear about the source of the power. *Have you ever encountered a new teaching that attracted you but left you uneasy about whether to trust it? How did you manage the conflict this set up in you?*

LAW: The teachers of the law were the scribes, the religious lawyers of the day. They had credentials and were the ones who officially ruled on the interpretation of any given law. *How do you respond when an new teacher suggests information that seems to challenge what you have always been taught?*

POSSESSED: The man in the synagogue was taken over by an evil spirit. This spirit could not tolerate what Jesus was teaching and so had to challenge him? *Have you ever witnessed the phenomenon of good being challenged by a person who resists new thinking? What memories of that event do you have?*

EVIL SPIRIT: People in Jesus' times believed that spirits were more powerful than humans but less powerful than God. These spirits readily interfered or intervened in human life, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. They were seen to have power to control human behavior. We carry residues of this thinking when we say; "I don't know what got into me", or, "the devil made me do it". *Do you ever find yourself carried away by a power that seems to come from outside yourself? Do you feel possessed by it? Can our modern day issue of addictions be such a power?*

CRIED: The possessive power cried out in distress. *Have you ever struggled with a 'demon' of some kind and found yourself crying out in distress when goodness is present? Is it really a call for help?*

JESUS OF NAZARETH: Can anything good come from Nazareth, was a common saying of Jesus' times. Goodness is taking on evil. *If you were in the synagogue that day, what would you make of all this? Have you ever witnessed such a duel?*

DESTROY: To destroy is to tear down, render useless, or powerless. The evil spirits sense that with the advent of Jesus, their reign is over. It appears that evil always knows ahead of everyone else that a power that could challenge its grip on people is near. *Why do you think this is so? Have you ever felt that someone was aware of a behavior or attitude of yours that you were struggling with? What feelings do you remember having about that person?*

KNOW: To know someone's name in Jesus' day was to have power over him or her. The evil spirits wanted to ward off Jesus' power by a good offense. *What questions could have been in the minds of the crowd when they witnessed this duel of powers?*

HOLY ONE OF GOD: The evil spirits knew Jesus' true name, that is, the holy one of God. *How does this contrast with the crowd, the scribes, and others, who were struggling to understand Jesus? Why do you think Mark starts off Jesus' mission with the account of this struggle of powers?*

QUIET: Jesus tells the evil spirits to be quiet. This is the first of many times someone is asked to be quiet about Jesus' true nature. *Why do you think Jesus does this?*

COME/CAME OUT: The evil spirits ask if Jesus has come out to destroy them, and then we find that Jesus commands them to come out of the man who was possessed. It seems that Jesus does this so that the afflicted man can come out of the prison of what was troubling him. *How does the fact that Jesus came to us in the Incarnation free you from your prisons of afflictions?*

SHOOK: The evil that was in possession of the man did not give up easily. Like anything that possesses us, it has its roots in something that provides us some function. *What "evil spirits" or possessions do you struggle with? What struggle would you go through in the process of eliminating them from your life?*

VIOLENTLY: The man was shook violently. An alcoholic might relate to this if they went cold turkey in order to detox their system. A smoker might suffer a withdrawal symptom that makes them hard to live with until they get past the worst of the process. A dieter might also find their life drastically changed and their moods surly. *Is it worth this period of suffering in order to get rid of a possession? What needs to happen in order for you to say yes to this process?*

SHRIEK: Shrieking seems to be a part of one's personality change when engaged in the process of casting out a 'demon'.
Have you ever been on the receiving end of this when someone close to you was going through the process of being freed from an addictive habit? How did you respond? With understanding? With impatience? With joy, because you knew freedom was on the other side?

ORDERS: Orders are mandates to perform an action by someone in authority.
If you had been on the fence about who Jesus was that day, how would you respond to seeing his authority over the evil spirits? Would it have been joy? Fear? Some of both? Why?

OBEY: Since the evil spirits did obey Jesus, it would be hard to dismiss him as just somebody from that no-place Nazareth.
How might this change your life? Do you believe that good is stronger than evil? Do the gospel accounts of the works of Jesus help you in believing this?

NEWS: The word, gospel, literally means good news.
When you study the scriptures do you find them bringing good news to you?

QUICKLY: The speed at which this news spread throughout the area suggests that Jesus' message is off to a running start. In the gospel of Mark, you sense that you need running shoes to keep up with what is taking place. The desperation of the people makes them very attuned to any signs of hope.
What signs of hope that good is stronger than evil do you see today?

WHOLE REGION: Mark tells us that the entire region spreads the news quickly. This suggests that the people were very ready for any good news that came along.
How do you spread good news to those around you? Is your sense of being loved without condition by God, the good news message that you freely share in your daily contacts? How?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mk. 1:21-28 // Lk. 4:31-7; Mk. 1:22 // Mt. 7:28f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:

Fourth Sun. of Year: Dt. 18:15-20; Ps. 95: 1-2,6-9; I Cor. 7:32-35; Mk. 1:21-28;
Revised Common Lectionary: Dt. 18:15-20; Ps. 111; I Cor. 8:1-13; Mk. 1:21-28;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

1.21-45: A series of healings without opposition. Diseased people in the ancient world were often thought to be possessed by demonic forces (b. *Ketub.* 6lb). In Mark the healings enact the eschatological promises of Isa 35.5-6 and establish Jesus' power over Satan's minions at the end of time, evidence that the kingdom of God has drawn near. The unclean spirits were sometimes understood to have been descended from fallen angels (*J En.* 15.8,34; *Jub.* 7.21; 10.1; nQPs' 19.15; iQM 13.5). In 1 *En.* 9-10 the giants of Gen 6 were called "mamzerin," illegitimate mixed offspring of heavenly beings and human women, and evil spirits derived from these could be considered "bastard spirits." Although there has been a tendency in the modern period to distinguish Jesus' healings from those of contemporary Jews and others, this is a theological not a historical judgment. The miracles in the Gospels contain the same procedures, healing formulae (e.g., "be muzzled," "rebuked" v. 25, often retaining the original Aramaic, e.g., 7-34 "ephphatha"), and demonological lore as the magic of the ancient world. Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY: Oxford Univ. Press. 2011, Pg. 63.

"Simple truths are more powerful than empires." -Mahatma Gandhi

"The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of ourselves." - William Hazlitt

"If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless." -Adrienne Rich

People will recognize us as speaking with authority only when they sense that, like Jesus, we are under divine authority ourselves, that our message is not our own, that our actual lives stand behind the message, that our words are meant to reveal God and not ourselves, that we love others enough to give up protecting ourselves, that our real concern is God's kingdom and not how we impress others, that we consider the community bigger than ourselves, and that we are willing to sweat blood rather than *get bitter or walk away*. Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. *Ministering with authority*. *The Catholic Messenger*, 2/6/03. Page 10.

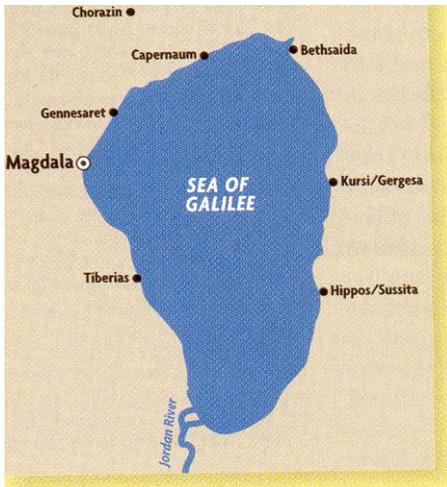
It seems to me that we have all grown up with the idea that holiness is the same as purity. It is perhaps liberating that Jesus, in Mark's view, was against this idea, favoring compassion as authentic holiness, compassion with its need for empathy, Seeing oneself in those who suffer; courage, convincing oneself to take action when it seems unwise or unsafe; and persistence, sometimes called commitment, in order to carry through. Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2011-12. Pg. 37.

But the healings are also an expression of the Galilee discourse of the Kingdom. In Mark there is an unusual and unexpected convergence between preaching and healing. This is signaled immediately in the first public action of Jesus, the exorcism at Capernaum (Mk. 1:21-28). Jesus expels a demon from a possessed man, but it is presented as an illustration of his teaching with authority, unlike the scribes (Mk. 1:22,27). In point of fact, it is especially in the healing episodes that the two worlds, the two

discourses of Jesus and his opponents come into most sustained conflict. In effect, he performs his healings in the face of and over the objection of the guardians of purity, who do not recognize him, though the unclean spirits do. Pgs. 42-3. Beck Robert. [Banished Messiah](#). Eugene, OR. Wlpf & Stock. 2010/

In practice, the monotheistic traditions often elevate Satan to a force independent of God, which technically is heresy and turn them into something more akin to Zoroastrianism, with its concept of the dueling deities of Light and Darkness. Pg. 139. Grassie, William. *The New Sciences of Religion*. Zygon. 3/08

So another level of the story concerns this contest of spirits – holy and unclean. This is language borrowed from the Jewish ritual, as laid out in the book of Leviticus. The holy and the unclean were uncanny and powerful realities beyond the realm of ordinary living, and they need to be fenced off from the daily world. One shouldn't touch the ark of the covenant. It was dangerously holy. Nor should one touch a leper. Lepers were dangerously unclean. And now the two powers are at war in the spiritual realm. Pg. 38. Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B: 2005*. Pgs. 36-40. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)



Capernaum: was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee at a place called Tell Hum. It was the chief commercial and social center of this area during the ministry of Jesus. Here, on the great highway between Syria and Palestine, custom taxes were collected and a Roman garrison was stationed. Here Jesus came after leaving Nazareth, and Peter's home became his home. Here he called Matthew and here he taught and preached, and did "many great works."

Christ predicted Capernaum's downfall, and today its scattered heaps of black basalt building stones extend for a mile along the shore of the sea. Here and there, faint outlines of buildings appear above the surface. The more important of these are the ruins of an octagonal-shaped structure now shown as Peter's house (more probably a memorial building on the site of the home of the apostle Peter), and the remains of one of the finest and best preserved synagogues of Galilee.

Capernaum is on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee and is 7 miles north of Tiberias. During the early roman period it was an important border village between Galilee and the Golan, and Jesus probably lived there during some part of his Galilean ministry. A 1978-82 excavation uncovered the foundations of large villas, a Roman bath, shops, fish pools and coins.

A true spiritual authority challenges us with our own potential, our own vision, our own promise of glory. A true spiritual authority leaves us busy thinking our own thoughts rather than merely mouthing his. The one sure way to spot false authority in spiritual matters is the suggestion that your troubles are over and that you have arrived, that the work of your imagination is complete. A true spiritual authority leaves us with our own work to do. There is no final ending.

Jones, Alan. [Exploring Spiritual Direction](#). Boston. Cowley Pub. 1999. Pg. 104.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love have the final word in reality. That is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Martin Luther King. –Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

According to ancient magical practice, one means of protection against the power of malicious or malevolent spirits is to call out the name (and true identity) of that spirit. The apocryphal Testament of *Solomon* is like a modern-day physician's desk reference listing the names of various spirits, what they do, and how human beings might thwart or counteract their power. For instance, "The nineteenth (spirit) said, 'I am called Mardero. I inflict incurable fevers; write my name in some way in the house, and I retreat immediately'" (*Testament of Solomon 18.23*) By shouting out Jesus' true identity, the unclean spirit seeks to thwart Jesus' power....Authority is a major problem for Jesus' contemporaries. No one denies the mighty deeds of power that Jesus performs. What troubles them is the source of his authority. Is it God?

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B](#). The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1996. Page 29.

Part of good teaching is the ability to discover good things about people who seem to be bad students. And part of being a good student is the ability to discover good things about people who seem to be bad teachers.

Woodruff, Paul. [Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2001. Pg. 190.

"The real sin against the Holy Spirit is refusing to recognize, with 'theological' joy, some concrete liberation that is taking place before one's very eyes." Juan Luis Segundo

Evil is great, it is dreadful, and it cannot be explained away. Yet good is nonetheless always greater and more powerful – of this we may be convinced with absolute certainty. Evil, in all its forms, is always a lack of good, a defect, which may be great and frightful, yet is ultimately never greater than the good of which it is a distorted or deprived form. Pg. 102.

Schonbon, Cardinal Christoph. [Chance or Purpose](#). San Francisco. Ignatius Press. 2007

Buddha was accosted one time by some bandits who were going to rob and kill him. And the bandit had a very sharp sword and Buddha said, "Before you kill me, would you grant me one dying wish, a last wish." The bandit said, "Sure." So Buddha said, "That tree there, cut the branch off of it." And so he did. So Buddha said, "Now restore that branch to the tree." The man laughed at him. Buddha said, "You act like a child. Anybody can destroy. Anybody can kill. But only the really strong can create and heal."

SELECTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B: 2005. Pgs. 36-40. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2011-12. Pgs. 34-37. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Shea, John. [The Hour of the Unexpected](#). Argus Communications, Allen, TX. 1977. **A PRAYER TO THE SLEEPLESS GOD**: Page 31

Grana, Janice. [Images](#). St. Mary's College Press, Winona, MN. 1976. **ON BEING BORN AGAIN**. Donna Swanson. Page 143.

Some years ago, a young man who wanted to change his life went into a church and sat down in the sanctuary for awhile. He took out a piece of paper and a pencil and began writing down a long list of things that he promised he would do to change his life - a whole page of things - and he signed his name at the bottom and took it up and placed in on the altar, and sat down again in the sanctuary.

As he was sitting there, however, he began to sense the voice of God speaking softly in his own soul. And the more he listened to it, the more he heard God saying to him, "You've done it all wrong. I want you to go back up there and get the piece of paper and tear it up. And then I'll give you another instruction."

So, the young man got out of his pew and walked up to the altar and did as the Lord told him. And then he went back to sit down in the pew and waited for the Lord to instruct him. It did not happen immediately, but finally the message came through.. The Lord said to him, very gently, "Now take a piece of paper and sign your name to it at the bottom and let me fill in the rest." Boulware, Barry P.: First United Methodist church, Kansas City, KS, who got it from a colleague Norman Neaves)