

## Homily for Epiphany 4, 2021

Mark 1:21-28

*'The authority of Jesus'*

*Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer*

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### TEXT - Mark 1:21-28

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' <sup>28</sup>At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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### INTRODUCTION (260)

The major theme in our Gospel reading,  
Is the authority of Jesus,  
- the **authority** of Jesus.

So let's begin by thinking about this word *authority*.

If you've parked your car in a no-standing zone,  
And a stranger in regular clothes comes up and says they're going to give you a ticket,

You're likely to tell them to mind their own business,  
Even if you know you shouldn't be parked there.

But if that person has a particular uniform on,  
With a bade,  
That says Constable Smith,

You'll react very differently wont you?

Why is that?

Because the uniform,  
The badge,

That person being a police officer,

Invests them with **authority**.

Now,  
Let's say you're watching the news or listening to the radio,

And they're talking about some obscure thing that's happening like how  
there's an unusually high number of mosquitos around this year,

And there's this anecdote from Joe Bloggs and that theory from Bob Smuith,

But then they say,  
We're going to bring in Professor Brown,

He's down three PhDs and written 14 books on mosquitos,

He's the **authority** on this subject.

When a young teacher enters the classroom for the first time,  
Or a substitute teacher with little experience,

One of the things they'll often struggle with is that feeling,

That they just have no authority to control behavior and keep the students on task.

Well,  
What about the authority of Jesus?

How does it show itself in this text?  
Why is it important?  
How does it relate to us today?

Let's look at it more closely now.

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### **JESUS' AUTHORITY IN WHAT HE SAYS (570)**

First, we see Jesus' authority in what he says.

As was Jesus' custom,  
On the Sabbath day he goes to the synagogue to teach.

Synagogues for the Jewish people at that time,  
Were places where the Scriptures were read,

And a variety of people could offer commentary and teaching on the  
Scriptures.

There might be regulars on a roster of sorts,  
But then visiting guests who were known to be respected teachers might also  
be called on to teach.

So it's not strange in itself what Jesus taught.

But it was what he taught,  
And how he taught,

That gets people's attention.

*"<sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."*

Now we aren't given the actual content here of what this sounded like,  
Just that it was on contrast to the scribes,  
The regular teachers.

As best we can work out,

the main contrast here is that the normal manner of teaching would have  
been quoting the traditions that have gone before,

so a Scribe would quote this Rabbi and then that teacher,

lots of footnotes with sources, you could say.

Whereas with Jesus,  
There was something much more direct,

He didn't rely on sources and other traditions,  
He spoke on his own authority.

Think of how he says it in Matthew's Gospel,

*'You have heard it said,  
But I say to you...'*

Some of you know dear Dr Renner,  
A pastor of our Church who was active in ministry into his 90s.

Dr Renner was involved in the very beginnings of the Lutheran Church of  
Australia.

And I've actually been in a room as a young pastor with other pastors,

When we were discussing some document, I can't remember what it was now,

And there was this opinion and that opinion,  
And then at some point someone asked Dr Renner,

Dr Renner,  
Weren't you involved in writing this thing?

And he said,  
Yes I think I was.

And immediately,  
He spoke to this issue with a certain authority,  
That the others of us didn't have.

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But it's not only that objective authority that counts is it?

It was also as I listened to Dr Renner,  
That I could recognize his authority on the issue.

It's as that authority on mosquitos actually begins to speak,

That you realize he or she has a command of their area in a very special way,

You subjectively also recognize their authority.

And it seems to me,  
Something like that was going on with Jesus too.

Everywhere Jesus went there was something out his teaching and his  
preaching,

Even the way he called people to follow him,

That Jesus exuded authority,

You couldn't miss it,  
Even if you didn't like it.

\*

And just a word of application to us today before we move on,

We need always to recognize and submit ourselves to ultimate authority of  
what Christ' Jesus says,

To the authority of his Word.

It can be tempting for people to take Jesus as simply one teacher among many,

So there's Socrates and Plato,  
Mohamed and Buddha,  
Jesus and Paul.

Now of course there is wisdom to be found in all the great teachers through  
history,

But as Christians we acknowledge Jesus Christ and his teaching,

To be the final authority,

On God,  
On us,

In the Church,  
In our lives.

We see Jesus' authority in what he says.

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## JESUS' AUTHORITY IN WHAT HE DOES (630)

Next,  
We see Jesus' authority,  
In what he **does**.

*"<sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,  
<sup>24</sup>and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?  
Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'"*

If you were here last Sunday,  
You may remember that we looked at Jesus' first public preaching,  
That *'the time is fulfilled'*,  
And *'the kingdom of God is near'*.

Well,  
What we see in the rest of the Gospel,  
And this is an example,

Is that as God's kingdom in Christ Jesus draws near,  
It necessarily confronts another kingdom,

Well, in fact,  
Every other kingdom,  
Every other claim to power and authority in this world.

But what's surprising perhaps,  
Is that the first confrontation is not with any human kingdom,

But with what the Scriptures present to us as the competing kingdom,  
That is the kingdom of the evil one.

And isn't it mysterious and intriguing that this demonic presence,  
Here named an *'unclean spirit'*,

Is the first to recognize Jesus and who he is,  
Before any human being.

We can understand this perhaps if we think about it with examples in our life.

I've heard that people who have been in trouble with the law in their lives,  
Perhaps spent time in jail, etc,

Sometimes develop an incredible ability to perceive when police are nearby,

They can spot them even in plain clothes,

They can pick out the unmarked police car.

Since they've become accustomed to being afraid of getting into trouble when  
the police are near,

They see them coming a mile away,

And they make themselves scarce.

Well, it seems something like that happens with the unclean spirits,

They perceive at the deepest possible level who this Jesus is and what he's  
come to do,

They know his holiness cannot coexist with their uncleanness,

They know he has come to deal with sin, and uncleanness, and evil,  
Yes, to destroy it!

But unlike the common criminal in our world,  
They don't flee,

Like that modern Christian song says,  
*'They knew they had no place to hide'.*



So what does Jesus do?

*<sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'*

*<sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him."*

Do you see the authority?

Some commentators point out that it's common in the literature and practice of the occult and other pagan rituals that naming one's opponent can be a means of gaining power.

So that perhaps the unclean spirit's attempt to name Jesus as the holy one fo God is an attempt to wield some sort of power over him.

But what's clearly shown to us in this scene is that this is not a spiritual arm wrestle,

This is a demonstration of the supreme authority of Christ Jesus over all other powers,

He drives out this unclean spirit with just a few words,

And this man is delivered.

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It seems to me this sort of text gives us some good parameters in which to think about the reality and activity of evil in our world today.

Because if, on the one hand,

We're tempted to think this is all outdated stuff,  
just how primitive people thought,  
we're modern, we're sophisticated, we're scientific,

we have here our Lord Jesus acknowledging the reality of supernatural evil powers.

So we dare not too quickly dismiss this dimension of the Biblical worldview.

But on the other hand,  
If we are tempted to develop an unhealthy obsession with things of the demonic,

To become overly fearful of these things,

We also do well to hear of Jesus' absolute authority over every evil power.

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## **JESUS AUTHORITY AND PEOPLE'S RESPONSE**

So there was Jesus' authority in what he says,

Jesus' authority in what he does,

And finally there's Jesus authority and the people's *response*.

*"<sup>27</sup>They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'"*

The people's response is to be amazed,  
Astounded,  
Thunderstruck.

Now on the one hand,  
It's good for us to realise that what most often attracts people to the Christian faith,  
Is Christ himself.

So one way of trying to lead people into the faith is to simply get them to read one of the Gospels for themselves,  
To encounter Christ Jesus as he leaps off the pages.

For many people that has been the beginning of a journey of faith or renewed faith.

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But on the other hand,

notice very carefully,

Their response here,  
Is not necessarily,

The repentance and faith Jesus had called for.

Some of these people may have turned to God and believed in Christ,  
But we're not told that,

Instead, what emphasized is their sheer ***amazement***.

It's worth noticing this because in the Gospels,  
And still today,

It is possible to perceive in Jesus something truly amazing,  
To discern in the Christian faith and the life of the church something truly *of God*,

And yet to resist that in one's own response.

I know of people,  
Who can be amazed by Jesus' teaching and miracles,

Who have even experienced things in their own lives,

But who still stop short,

Of a life of repentance, faith and following him.

Amazement, is not faith.

You see this in the Gospels,

Because some of the amazement,

Ends up turning into outright rebellion and murderous rage.

And in fact it's Jesus' claim to authority,

that is a big part of why the plotting against him moves into high gear.

Little did they know,

That *'no one would take his life from him'*,

he had *'authority to lay down his life,*

*And authority to take it up again'* John 10:18

Little did they know that when they nailed him to a cross,

As the ultimate challenge to his authority as God's holy one,

He was *'disarming the rulers and authorities...'* of this world, *'...triumphing over them...'* Col 2:15.

In his death,

In his resurrection,

He has won the victory,

And it's all for you.

And all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him,

Which he now shares with his church.

That's why your pastors can say to you regular,  
As I say again now,

*'By the authority Christ has given his Church,  
I forgive you all your sins,  
You are washed from all your uncleanness,*

*By the authority Christ has given his Church,  
I say to any and every form of evil,  
Be silent, and be gone,  
in Jesus' name'.*

It's Christ Jesus who did all this and is doing all this,

Who calls you not only to be amazed,  
But to repent,  
To believe,  
and to follow him.

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## **CONCLUSION**

The authority of Jesus,

In what he says,

In what he does,

And how we respond.

Jude 1:25?