

Mark 1:21-28

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 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." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 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." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The Gospel of Mark is about Jesus and the people that follow him. Since we are followers of Jesus, the Scripture appeals to us as well. Today's Scripture takes place very early in the ministry of Jesus. He moves throughout Galilee doing remarkable work of teaching, freeing, and forgiving sins. He calls Capernaum home but he does not set up shop there so that people can come to him like they did John the Baptist at the Jordan River. No, Jesus is a missionary, he travels from town to town to go to the people instead of expecting the people to come to him.

Jesus starts his teaching ministry in a synagogue. His teaching demonstrates his authority. The content of his teaching is not revealed at this time, because the lesson is not about what he said, the lesson is about the speaker himself and the reaction of the people to him. The people were amazed at his teaching because he spoke with authority. He did not speak like the scribes. While he is teaching there in the synagogue, there is a man with an unclean spirit. This is an exorcism; the man is possessed by a demon. Our familiarity with such things is what Hollywood reveals to us in fantasy and mystery. But for the people of the day, this is a real problem. The problem is fixed from the power of the spoken word of the Lord. The people are amazed at his authority. Even the demons obey him instantly. The authority of Jesus is established at the beginning of his ministry. Fame has spread throughout the region due to fact that the people recognized his authority. The exorcism shows that he has the authority to command the unclean spirits to obey him. The power is a sign of God. The teaching is informative and transformative and is supported by the healing power. Jesus has the power over evil, his word has authority, and his word alone has authority over the forces of evil.

There are different reactions to Jesus. We do not see a response from the scribes this early in the scripture. The plot to destroy Jesus does not develop until after his authority is established. It is later, after his authority is established and he becomes famous with people flocking to see him that the charge of blasphemy is made against him for forgiving sins. We know nothing about the response of the man that was healed. The people's response to Jesus is that of being overwhelmed with astonishment. They were in awe at his great teaching. His fame grew because of the eyewitness testimony of the crowd. The response of the unclean spirit was to cry out. The spirit was more perceptive than the people. The unclean spirit immediately recognized the divine authority of Jesus and acknowledges his status as "Holy One of God." Take a moment and reflect on the fear. The demon is scared of retaliation "Have you come to destroy us? What have you to do with us?" The reaction of the demon proves the divine status of Jesus. The only remaining response to Jesus for us to consider is our response.

The focus of the biblical lesson is in establishing the fact that the authority of Jesus is beyond what is humanly possible here on earth. The word of the Lord is backed up with this special authority. This authority is of God. The healing is an illustration that the authority is from God. All of the forces of evil are powerless against God. They are subject to the power of the word. The miracles authenticate divine authority. One of the problems that the people faced during biblical times was the tendency to blame the victims for their problems. An example of such archaic attitudes is when the friends of Job blamed him for the infirmities that his family endured. They begged Job to repent and confess his sins thinking that some past hidden sins are the reasons behind his hardships. Unfortunately such attitudes are sometimes carried forward into contemporary society. Jesus knew this was not the problem and he sets an example for us to follow. Jesus passes no judgment on the suffering. There is no call for repentance. When Jesus reaches out to the person, whoever that person may be, he reaches out to cleanse us, to free us, heal us, and restore us. Jesus restores us to wholeness in a chaotic and broken life. The reaction of Jesus to the evil spirit is silence and come out. His reaction is not to destroy or punish. His reaction is to set free. Jesus sets us free. Jesus set the evil spirit free and restored the man.

The focus of the story is to establish the divine authority of Jesus. He has the power to set people free. This power is real for us today. Jesus speaks words of restoration. He restores the well being of the man in the synagogue. He sends the tormenting spirit out of his life. He restores the people of Israel. He repairs what is broken in the religious establishment that is more focused on rules and controlling people rather than caring for them. The people see something new, different, and exciting that they do not fully understand. So they are left astounded and amazed because Jesus has demonstrated that he is Lord of all – the people then, the people now, and even the evil spirits. The main thing for us to consider is what our response to Jesus is.