

## "The One with Authority (Power)"

Scriptures: Psalm 111  
Mark 1:21-28

Preached: 2/1/15

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You know when you are in the presence of authority. You can sense it... feel it. Maybe you have experienced this at a concert where you have purchased tickets to see your favorite band. You have to sit through one or more opening bands which you try to convince yourself are going to be pretty good.



You don't know their songs, there's not as much lighting, they don't use the full stage. But when the lead singer of the main band walks confidently to the microphone

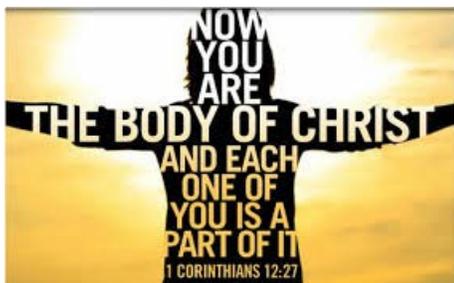


the whole crowd tenses. This is what everyone has been anticipating. He stands at the microphone, waiting, you hear some whistles and shouts, but very quickly the whole room becomes quiet. The lead singer has authority. He can say whatever he wants. He holds the audience in the palm of his hand.

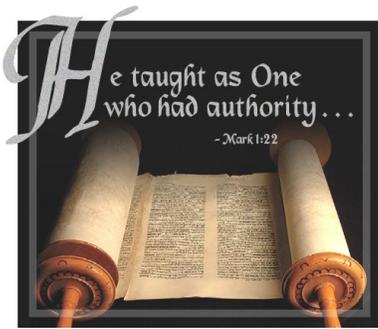
His authority comes from his past work. He has earned his fame.



People came to hear his voice. They have given this band, this singer authority. Who else do you grant authority? We grant authority to those who have led us, parented us, taught us, governed us, saved us. That could be a grandmother or grandfather. It might be a teacher or professor, a coach, a community leader or politician, an esteemed colleague at work or a mentor in your neighborhood.



Who has authority in the church? Those who are ordained and elected? Those who have a title or an office? Those who have demonstrated deep faith in God, regardless of what title they hold or where they serve. They are people of prayer, students of scripture, respecters of others. They think before they speak, listen to varied opinions, remain open to God's Holy Spirit. They have a quiet, peaceful confidence about them – which comes from their relationship with Jesus Christ.



The One with authority among us surely is Jesus Christ himself. Not just the Jesus of history – but the Jesus who died, who was crucified, was buried, but rose again by the power of God. And, the Jesus whom we know to be present among us, when we break the bread together and lift the cup, the Jesus who makes our hearts tingle in worship and who picks us up when we walk in a dark valley – sometimes even in the valley of the shadow of death. The same Jesus of our hope, whom we know will come again, when time and history are fulfilled. So, the Jesus who was and is and is to come. This is the One with authority.



We have a clear, early picture of this Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Mark has the reputation of being a succinct writer, even terse. The action is straight-forward, to the point. Mark doesn't waste a lot of time with extraneous details, he is not as wordy as Luke or even Matthew, not as theological as John. Mark follows Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom of God, and the calling of the first disciples, with an immediate and bold demonstration of Jesus' power and authority.



Jesus has gone to a Sabbath synagogue service and stands up to lead. We are told nothing about the content of what Jesus said or what texts he read. For Mark it is not so much the content of what Jesus taught – but the authority with which he speaks (verse 22) and the power of those words, different in tone and texture from the traditional scribes.



The worshipers were used to professionals following established scholarly traditions. They interpreted God's Word – the Torah, along predictable lines, debating points of law along familiar schools of thought.

Jesus' words surely stirred up that sleepy congregation in Capernaum. Just how deep that stirring was became evident when Jesus was confronted by a frightened "unclean spirit." Apparently terrified of a new word from God, this demonic had lived comfortably within the status quo of the synagogue. But Jesus' call for a fresh interpretation of the faith life must have provoked the spirit. The demonic being could not remain silent, thus betraying its presence to Jesus. Mark makes sure we understand the cause for the intensity of the demonic spirit's fear by quoting its wheezy outcry directed at Jesus, "the Holy One of God." As the Book of James would put it later, "Even the demons believed and trembled"

(James 2:19).

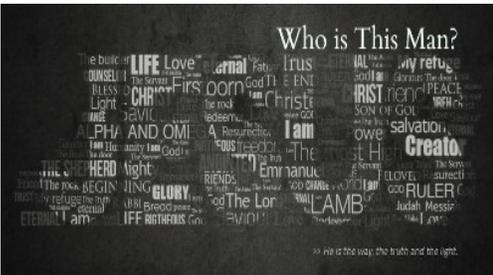


Unwittingly, the unclean spirit seals its own fate with its outburst. Invoking the very authority the spirit feared, Jesus orders the demonic spirit come out of the man. We witness a dramatic change, a reversal, if you will – this is no simple or smooth transition. There is great "convulsing" and "crying out" (verse 26) when the spirit obeys Jesus' rebuke. Witnesses present are "amazed" and whisper uneasily about the implications of Jesus' power and authority for their own lives.

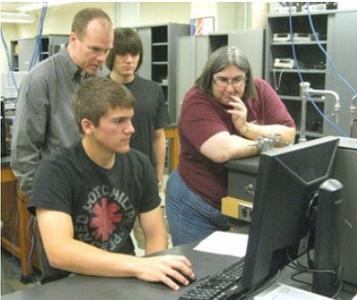


This is partly the function of Sunday worship for us – to be amazed by the Word of God – to consider it for our lives – and to contemplate the implications of Jesus’ authority (read “power”) for our decisions and actions.

Most biblical miracle stories, including exorcisms, conclude with a demonstration of the effectiveness of the cure and the response of those who have observed it. But here, in Mark, we get no demonstration and the response of the bystanders is a curious one: “What is this?” they ask, “A new teaching...with authority? He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” Jesus’ power over the spirit reinforces the earlier judgment – his teaching really is authoritative!



Then, as now, the Jesus story culminates in a question. The earlier question, “What is this?” calls up another, more profound one, “Who is this?” Who is this man? What is the source of his power? What do these events mean? At least those standing by do not know what is at hand. The answer is not obvious, and, in fact, the question will continue throughout the Gospel story. And, I suppose, it continues for us.



We are always searching, asking questions Who is this Jesus? How do we feel about his power? What does that mean for our lives?

These questions are made even more intriguing because our modern minds assume that such a miracle as Mark describes in the exorcism of the unclean spirit would be so overwhelmingly convincing that everyone would immediately bow down to Jesus.

The Gospel writers know otherwise. They know that miracles demonstrate power, but power can come from a variety of sources, both good and evil. The Gospel writers also know that understanding who Jesus is and what his mission entails involves far more than simply witnessing a miracle. As with every aspect of Jesus’ ministry, the miracles and the teaching raise as many questions as they provide answers.

Perhaps we witness miracles all the time – and everyone is clearly not falling to their knees to give God praise. There are always a variety of interpretations to any event.

Yet we continue to go back to Jesus.



We come to His Table, partake of His meal. We listen for his Word, wait for his leading, celebrate his presence among us, practice the challenging life he demonstrates. The Psalmist says, “The LORD has shown his people the power of his works...” Through Jesus and his presence among his followers, we see God’s power, accept his authority. “What is this?!” Who is this?!” This is Jesus, my lord and savior, the one with the ultimate authority in my life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.