

Spoken with Authority
Mark 1:21-28

One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority not as the teachers of the law. That's an interesting phrase: "as one who had authority . . ."

Where does authority come from? If you've ever been in the military you know that authority comes by rank, by your position.

Let's say you're a captain in the Army and you're in charge of one sergeant and four men. Your task is to raise a 100-foot flagpole and slide it into a 10-foot deep hole. You have two ropes - one is 22-feet long and one is 26-feet long. You have two shovels and two 5-gallon buckets. How do you, as a Captain, get that flagpole into the ground?

Simple. As a captain, you turn to the sergeant and say, "Sergeant, get the flagpole into the ground!" That's positional authority. You command those under you, and they obey.

Others have authority because of their personality or their knowledge or their extreme competence. As a carpenter, Jesus had no positional authority in the community. His authority came from his wisdom and knowledge and his ability to interpret God's Word. Even as a boy Jesus wowed people with his wisdom and grasp of scripture.

Of course the people in Capernaum could not know that his authority came from a more important source. All they knew is that they had never heard an individual teach like Jesus taught. They said to one another, "He teaches as one who has authority, not as the teachers of the law."

But even Jesus got interrupted from time to time. Like in our lesson this morning where a man - *in the synagogue* - disrupted Jesus' teaching. Interesting to note that not all the needy people in this world are on the outside of the church.

Mark tells us this man was "possessed by an impure spirit." We don't know what Mark meant by this. Most modern people dismiss the idea of demons and unclean spirits. We assume this is pre-scientific language for mental illness, but who knows?

Whatever the origin of his problem, obviously the man was deeply distressed. He cried out, "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!" (Have you ever noticed that the impure spirits recognized who Jesus was long before the people of Capernaum did?).

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" And then something remarkable happened. The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." And Mark tells us, "News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."

So, **Jesus had authority because of his teachings.** And because of his teachings and the power of his teachings he had authority over what Mark calls "impure spirits." In other places we see his authority over disease and nature, even over death.

This brings us to something obvious we need to affirm about Jesus: he was unique. There was no one quite like him. There were other fine teachers in Galilee, but they couldn't cast out impure spirits, or turn water into wine or heal lepers or multiply fish and loaves, or forgive sins.

There was something about Jesus which could not be said about his contemporaries. He had authority—physical authority, spiritual authority, moral authority. Even after his death and resurrection, he had authority.

When confronted by someone who was demon-possessed or who was blind or physically challenged, all the disciples had to do was evoke Jesus' name and demons were cast out and the physically challenged were made whole and the blind could see. That's authority.

Jesus was a wonderful teacher, but no mere teacher has the authority to raise the dead. Jesus was a leader, a prophet, a moral visionary but none of these explain his impact on civilization.

Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40 and Jesus for only 3 ½ years. Yet the influence of Christ's ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined years of teaching from these greatest of philosophers.

Jesus didn't paint pictures, yet some of the finest artists such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from Him. Jesus did not write poetry, but Dante, Milton and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him.

Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the music they composed in His praise. Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth.

It took a Roman centurion, stationed at the foot of the cross who watched him die, to sum it all up, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mt. 27-54)

So here's the rub: **if Jesus is the son of God, shouldn't we reflect his influence more in our lives?** If he is the Son of the most high God and if his teachings are the foundation upon which our lives are built, shouldn't that be reflected in how we live?

Right? One day we're going to see the Bridegroom, our Lord and Master. Doesn't seem that it should matter how we live our lives today. If we really believe Jesus is who he says he is, then that reality should be evident in our lives and reflected in the community in which we live and the people with whom we associate.

And if Jesus is who he says he is, shouldn't we tell that good news to others?