

Authority

Mark 1: 21-28 (January 28, 2018)

Mark 1: 21-22

²¹They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Historical Context

A synagogue was where Jews met to gain a fuller understanding of their tradition through study and worship. Anyone with sufficient knowledge could teach. The “scribes” were specialists in the interpretation and application of Mosaic law to daily life. They frequently quoted scripture and tradition, but Jesus does not: he speaks directly, confident of his “authority”.

The word for authority, *exousia*, is related to the verb *exesti*, meaning "it is free" or "it is permitted." In other words, *exousia* is the "sovereign freedom" of one who acts without hindrance. Jesus' teaching in sovereign freedom is contrasted with the teaching of the scribes. The difference is that the scribes' teaching authority depends on their knowledge of and adherence to tradition--especially the traditional interpretation of the Torah. However, Jesus teaches with an independent authority--or rather, on the authority of God. Whereas the scribes are bound to tradition, Jesus is relatively free--free in the way that only one who lives directly from and to God's authority is free.

Theme: Authority

The passage from Mark draws concerns about the world and about authoritative teaching together. The people were astonished that Jesus taught with authority. The text goes on to show Jesus acting with authority to confront evil, even in the household of faith.

Too often we identify the evil as out there and the good as in here. The great Russian novelist and ardent Orthodox Christian Alexander Solzhenitzen said something to the effect that, “the line between good and evil does not go between countries or empires or religions or political systems. The line between good and evil goes right down the middle of every human heart.”

Jesus comes to remove the unclean spirits from all of us, to attack that line that goes down the middle of our hearts. Like the man with the unclean spirit, we often wish the holy would leave us alone to live lives of selfishness and materialism. But, as the demons in our story recognized; Jesus has come to us on a mission of destruction; to tear down the walls of separation that keep us apart; to wipe out the diseases of the soul that keep us from knowing God’s love and from loving one another. Yes, Jesus comes to destroy, but he destroys in order to rebuild, reconstruct, recreate, remake us in the image of Christ.