



Readings:

Deuteronomy 18 v 15-20

Psalm 111

Mark 1 v 21-28

Holy and awesome God, your Son's authority is found in integrity and living truth, not the assertion of power over others.

Open our imaginations to new dimensions of your love and heal us of all that severs us from you and one another, that we may grow into the vision you unfold before us. Amen.

Mark 1 The Man with an Unclean Spirit

²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, Jesus 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.

Reflection by Rev'd Becky

I wonder if you remember your teachers from school and which of them had the best influence on you? I am sure we can all name the teachers who we know would be strict and those who would not. But those who had an influence in the long-term positive shaping of our lives are probably the ones who encouraged us and believed in us. Those who taught by how they lived as the following poem illustrates:

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

*If a child lives with criticism, a child learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, a child learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, a child learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, a child learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance, a child learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, a child learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise, a child learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness, a child learns justice.
If a child lives with security, a child learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval, a child learns to like themselves.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
a child learns to find love in the world.*

In our gospel today Jesus is revealed as teaching with authority. If we overlay the Old Testament reading onto the New then we find that Jesus words are prophetic- they speak of how powerful words from God are and re-emphasise how Jesus' words are too. We also see that Jesus' actions show authority. He is the LIVING Word.

Mark's gospel emphasises that any miracles that Jesus 'performs' are ways in which Jesus can teach about God and how to treat fellow humans. Miracles are not just signs in themselves and cannot be

separated from his teaching. Note this in today's reading; the authority of Jesus words include the miracle of the casting out of a demon. (In John's gospel, after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus got fed up of crowds following him just to see 'signs and wonders' and to ignore his words, his teaching.) The whole of the Gospel of Mark is asking us the question 'Can you allow yourself to be spoken to by this figure? Can you enter into the changed state of affairs that Jesus is living out?' (Rowan Williams)

Jesus words can shape our lives today. As Wesley wrote in his hymn 'He speaks, - and, listening to his voice, New life the dead receive; The mournful, broken hearts rejoice; The humble poor believe. Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, Your loosen'd tongues employ; Ye blind, behold your Saviour come, And leap, ye lame, for joy.'

Choose a miracle story in Mark's gospel and ask yourself the questions: What teaching does this miracle remind me of? How would Jesus speak to me if I were that person/s? How is God's kingdom coming in this scene and my life? How did they respond, how do I respond?

HYMN REFLECTION

The New Year is already one twelfth gone, and we have so far had four old hymns, with long, detailed histories.

Time for another new one, and we turn again to our own Bishop Timothy. The time scale of this hymn seems just right. We're still in the season of Epiphany, and today's Gospel reading comes from the first chapter of Mark.

The hymn begins, "When to our world the Saviour came". Christmas was not long ago. Then Bishop Timothy says "Of long ago, yet living still", and isn't Jesus' healing touch still so much needed? Timothy refers to every tongue, which reminds me of a hymn we used to sing in my youth, but which, sadly, is never heard now, *Thou to whom the sick and dying ever came, nor came in vain*. "Still the weary, sick and dying need a brother's, sister's care; on thy higher help relying, may we now their burden share". As I write, we're all in the lockdown again together, reaching out to "the healing Christ of all our days", but most of us also trying to do our best to help.

As I've said before, new hymns are often provided with both a new and an established tune. The established one in this case, *Church triumphant*, is more or less abandoned. Most of us learnt it to another hymn which has vanished from modern hymnals, *Again the Lord's own day is here*. So why not try John Barnard's new tune, written specially for the words, *Fossebridge*? It is in the new A & M, which so many churches are now using.

When to our world the Saviour came
the sick and helpless heard his name,
and in their weakness longed to see
the healing Christ of Galilee. [Mark I, 28]

That good physician! Night and day
the people thronged about his way;
and wonder ran from soul to soul,
"The touch of Christ has made us whole!"

His praises then were heard and sung
by opened ears and loosened tongue,
while lightened eyes could see and know
the healing Christ of long ago.

Of long ago: yet living still,
who died for us on Calvary's hill;
who triumphed over cross and grave,
his healing hands stretched forth to save.

His sovereign purpose still remains
who rose in power, and lives and reigns;
till every tongue confess his praise,
the healing Christ of all our days. MGS

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the
Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises
to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all
peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth.
Amen.