

Epiphany 4 – Wesley Uniting – 29th January 2012 –David Thiem

Theme: “Authority and Disruptions”

Mark 1:22 “The people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching,
he taught them as one who had authority ..”

Introduction

Today’s text is really the first time that we see Jesus in action in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus appears in the synagogue in Capernaum at the regular Sabbath service. Jews do not work on the Sabbath as it is primarily the day for them to set aside to be with God. The idea was to give themselves fully to the God who had fully given of self to them. Hence the Sabbath was purely to be with God, reflect on their faith and do the work God called them to do. The synagogue was a place where the Hebrew Scriptures could be studied and worship of God occurred. If there were at least ten married Jewish men in a town a synagogue could be established. Synagogue leaders could invite visiting teachers to participate in worship. This appears to be the case here as Jesus begins his public ministry in this Gospel.

Two things happen to make this occasion memorable:

1. The people are amazed with Jesus’ teaching and his authority, compared with the other teachers of the law
2. Jesus has an unexpected disruption to his teaching when some-one cries out declaring who he is but really seeking to cause dissent.

Let us look at these two differing aspects of what happened in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Authority

To speak with authority was evidently something rare in religious circles at the time of Jesus. Maybe things haven’t changed too much in that area!!! Jesus surprised people with his note of authority. When he spoke it touched ‘a chord’ so to speak with the people.

Today, who are the people or things we look to for authority? Our world seems full of people who profess to be full of knowledge in their fields of expertise.

- health
- wealth/financial advisors
- sport
- dieticians
- relationships
- stock market gurus
- psychologists
- astrologers
- political commentators
- gardening experts
- art & literature critics
- foodies and wine critics
- motoring experts
- ethical analysts
- defence experts
- preachers claiming the 'true gospel'
- collector junkies
- media & IT experts

The list is almost endless. We are overwhelmed by the array of people with skills that give them authority in their sphere of knowledge. Certainly within the congregation here at Wesley we have a profusion of experts in an incredible array of fields.

I am both amazed and in awe of the talent we have within our worshipping groups. The more I learn of people's lives the more wonderful I realize the breadth of people we have here.

But I wonder; have you ever paused to think what it must have been like to meet the human Jesus? Would it have been a delightful experience or a discomfoting one? Most likely in comfort or discomfort you would have sensed a special kind of charisma in Jesus. All kinds of people came under the power or authority (Greek word 'exousia') of Jesus. Women, men, lepers, children, the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, tax agents, fishermen, call girls, soldiers, village and city folk, devout scholars, educated and less educated all experienced the teaching authority (Greek word, 'didasko') as well as Jesus' personal charisma and authority.

Jesus' words and actions 'married up' in a way that had a profound effect on people's lives and on their faith. Here, at the outset of Mark's Gospel we have that highlighted.

An Unexpected disruption

In a sense, the manner in which Jesus dealt with the unexpected disruption only added to his authority. All of us have had to deal with unexpected disruptions. I learnt in my first parish in the mid-north of South Australia that disruptions occur in your service or sermon. I had one gentleman in one of the small country towns that I'm sure spent all week searching for a good joke or a funny story and at some point in the service Ron would stand up and say: 'Dave, that reminds me of such and such' and off he'd go. Five minutes later I'd attempt, usually in vain, to get the service or sermon back on track. (Wesley, don't get any ideas from that!) In many ways I thank Ron as he has given me some ability to cope with the unexpected which happens from time to time. For Jesus, in Mark's Gospel it happened right at the beginning of his ministry. A man yells 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!" Mark 1:24

An amazing faith statement, yet given by some-one not quite right in the mind. Jesus does not carry on a conversation with that person but perceives the need of the individual and in a sense the challenge given, orders the 'evil spirit' to be quiet and then calls it out of the individual. We know nothing of the background here except that Jesus speaks with authority and the healing occurs. A different time, a different culture but certainly a miracle occurred and the man was healed.

Reflection for Today

What can we take from this passage for ourselves today.

In one way I struggled with this because I tended to get 'caught up' with the healing miracle and trying to put that in a modern setting.

In reality what we should be looking at is what the people said before the healing miracle which was: 'the people were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority ..' Mark 1:22a

It is this authority from God, that we need to subject our lives to. This authority is shown in the healing miracle and only re-inforces what the people had already seen in Jesus' teaching.

"The people were all so amazed .." Mark 1:27 that it led to further faith questioning of themselves.

As we accept the authority and the Lordship of Christ we will experience a deepening of faith which also may be a little disruptive!

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, give us grace to receive you as you are, rather than as we would demand that you would be. Come to us, Lord Jesus. Inspire us, disrupt us if that is your will. Give us that which you know we need, rather than that which we desire. Restore to us the adventure of discipleship and the joy of service to the true, living God. Amen.