

Epiphany 4 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021

Mark 1:21-28

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A few days ago I was on a Zoom conversation with someone who was working from home. As we know people have been working from home a lot over the last year and this has often meant juggling the needs of work and younger children who are on school holidays.

At one point in our Zoom conversation, a child came into the study of the person I was talking to. The mother looked to the side and firmly and calmly said, 'I am in a meeting. Please leave the room and close the door', which the child did.

This little encounter reminded me once again of the power of language to affect reality. If we want to make a difference in the world, the main tool, and possibly the only tool we have at our disposal is the power of language.

We shape and create alternative realities through language. Through the use of a strong request, spoken with authority, my conversation partner was able to shape her environment in a way that enabled our Zoom conversation to continue.

Language can be used to build up and it can be used to tear down. It can be used to create life or destroy life.

This year the lectionary will be moving us through the Gospel of Mark. One of the big themes in Mark is that Jesus speaks with authority. One of the ways that Jesus speaks with authority is the use of command over unclean spirits.

In the language of the ancient world, physical and mental illness was often seen to be caused by bad Spirits. So exorcism was a form of healing. When Jesus commands the unclean spirit, 'Be silent and come out of him', Jesus is using the power of language to change this man's world for the better.

The authority with which Jesus speaks makes for 'Good News'. Rather than just talking about what Moses said, or what the other prophets said, Jesus typically speaks directly as the mouthpiece of God. It's an even more powerful form of speech than being a prophet. Prophets typically start their statements with something like, 'Thus says the Lord...'. But Jesus just comes right out with some statement, or declaration or teaching as if it is directly from God – which it is.

And the crowds love this, because the speech which Jesus uses is liberation and hope for their lives. It is, literally, Good News. The way John's gospel summarises this is that Jesus comes that people might have LIFE and have it abundantly.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter makes the connection between authority and being an author of a scroll. He says to the Jewish leaders, 'You killed the author of life'. In a nutshell this is the key theme of Mark's gospel – Jesus is the author of life – who speaks with power over every force which oppresses the sick. This is also a mystery and paradox because one third of Matthew's gospel is the story of Jesus' death.

Are there any ways in which Jesus has spoken with authority into our own lives in a way which has set us free. Perhaps things like this:

- Your sins are forgiven
- Stand up and walk
- You are a beloved child of God
- Don't be afraid
- I will never turn away from you

Has Jesus cast out any inner 'demons' in our lives. Voices like:

- You are useless
- No-one is interested in you
- You don't have anything to offer the world

Jesus speaks with authority to announce Good News of God's love into our hearts and set us free from those negative commands of accusation and degradation....what the Bible calls the voice of the Satan – the accuser.

We are now in a new book which God is authoring anew every day.

Jesus is a prolific writer. He is currently writing 7.8 billion books and counting.

And to blend our metaphors a bit, Jesus is, himself, the ONE book of life in which every life is bound up. We could think of Jesus as one book with 7.8 billion chapters.

Jesus speaks with authority, authoring each one of us, writing something new into existence in us, THROUGH our own decisions and freedom to respond. In this way we are co-authors with him and in him.

What is going to be written in us and through us today? And what is the good news of life and truth and liberation which we might help author for others through the power of language?