



Power to Do

February 1 • 2009

Focus Scripture Mark 1:21–28

Additional Scriptures
Deuteronomy 18:15–20
Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8:1–13

Powerful God, make us bold to embrace your wisdom and open to being shaped by its way. Speak to us, that we might enact your word and transform our world in amazing ways to conform to your way of compassion, love, and justice. Amen.

The people of Capernaum were amazed at Jesus' power to teach with authority and cast out demons. Jesus embodied God's wisdom, announcing surprising reversals on behalf of God's promised reign. Such wisdom comes from relationship with God, who equips those who are called with the power to do God's will.

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:21–28

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus is revealed as one who speaks and acts with God's authority. In the focus passage, Jesus teaches and casts out an unclean spirit.

There are no details about the content of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue that day in Capernaum. In Jesus' time, and in Mark's, the synagogue was a place for Jews to gather to study scripture and pray. Most towns with a Jewish population had a synagogue, sometimes meeting in a private home. Perhaps reporting that Jesus taught in the synagogue was an affirmation of Jesus' authority for Mark's first readers.

Through the account of Jesus healing the man with the unclean spirit, Mark continues to establish Jesus' power-filled authority. In Jesus' day, people believed in the presence of demons, evil powers, and various types of cosmic beings. Jesus, as God's child, had higher "standing" in this cosmic world order than demons or spirits. Jesus demonstrated God's power and desire to liberate those possessed by demons. Understanding this historical context may help move us away from interpreting this story too literally within our own worldview.

Possession by unclean spirits made persons ritually unclean. They could not go to the temple or participate in religious festivals; they were separated from God, family, and neighbours. The state of being ritually unclean, for the most part, was a temporary matter. People became unclean temporarily so that food could be prepared, the sick could be tended, babies could be born, and the dead could be prepared for burial. After a prescribed length of time or cleansing ritual, a person was rendered clean again. There is a significant distinction, however, between temporary uncleanness and long-

lasting dissociation from community, such as the person in today's reading experienced. In healing this person, a surprising reversal takes place; Jesus' amazing power reshapes and restores community and relationship with God.

God will provide wisdom, courage, and power to those whom God calls to lead. In **Deuteronomy 18:15–20**, an account from near the end of Moses' life, Moses assures the people that God will raise up new prophets who will speak with God's authority just as Moses has.

God is powerful. **Psalm 111** celebrates God's authority and desire to feed the hungry ones, keep the covenant, redeem the people, and reward the faithful.

The Corinthian Christians ask Paul for authoritative teaching in **1 Corinthians 8:1–13**. In Corinth, it was impossible to buy meat that had not been ritually sacrificed to one of the local gods. Paul agrees that rituals to gods that don't exist do not change the meat and, therefore, do not defile those who eat it. However, Paul also cautions that members of the Christian community are responsible for choosing to live in ways that build community.



God's living word of wisdom has power to do what is needful to enact God's reign of justice and compassion. As we open ourselves to the authority of God's word, we are empowered to reach out in word and deed – to teach and heal in ways that restore and build up individuals and communities. What does it mean to you to teach with Christ's authority? In what ways might you and your church use your God-given power to do what is important in God's reign?

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

