

Mic Drop

Mark 1:21-28

The breaking news coming from the city of Capernaum was that the Jesus train was gathering steam and picking up passengers. In the short space of just the first half of the first chapter of his Gospel, Mark traces Jesus' meteoric rise from obscurity to celebrity; beginning with a ringing endorsement at the Jordan River by his opening act, John the Baptist, to his gathering of followers from among the fisherfolk in Galilee. Even his fiercest critics — the Devil and his demons — were grudgingly conceding defeat and waving the white flag. A breakout preaching gig in Capernaum generated five-star reviews, peppered with words like "astounded" and "amazed. What we would describe today as a "mic drop" performance. A recurring theme of the comments registered by the residents of this seaside town was that Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Now, you can take Mark's assessment in one of two ways. You can read it as if the competency of the scribes always had been sub-par, but up until Jesus came along, nobody had any idea of what they had been missing. The problem with that approach is that it makes the quality of the scribes' teaching, the reference point of the story. Clearly, though, what Mark wanted people to take from this episode was an awareness of the profoundly unique nature of Jesus' message.

The truth is, the scribes *did* possess a substantial authority. They had the education and the training to teach people about God, based on what had been passed down to them from Moses and the Prophets. As far as we know, Jesus didn't have any kind of authority that was conferred on him by anyone else. Yet, Jesus taught with an authority surpassing that of the scribes, *without* the titles and formal education that they had.

What exactly was this teaching that so astonished Jesus' hearers? Well, if all we had to go on was Mark's Gospel, we'd never know. In some Bibles, every single word Jesus said is printed in red, so that you can't miss it. There's a lot less red ink in the Gospel of Mark compared to the other Gospels. You won't find the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Mark, as it is in Matthew. You will find far fewer of Jesus' parables recorded in Mark, compared to the Gospel of Luke. And we will never know *what* Jesus taught that day in Capernaum that blew people's minds, based solely on Mark's version of the story. We only know *how* he taught. And the *impact* his words had.

In fact, the one and only thing that Jesus said that day, which Mark did consider significant enough to write down for posterity, was spoken *not* to the congregation in the synagogue, but to a man possessed by an unclean spirit. When this man spots Jesus, the unclean spirit within him reacts with a clear understanding of Jesus' authority over him. He shrieks, "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." To which, Mark informs us, Jesus replied, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

That's it? Out of everything astonishing that Jesus had to say on that day, *this* is what Mark considered a "red-letter" moment to remember? Maybe, what Mark wants us to know is that Jesus' teaching authority was about *more than* the words themselves. It was about the powerful effect that his words could have. Jesus' words had the power to do more than teach people *about* God. More than the power to astound and amaze. Jesus' words had the power to *change lives*. The power to heal and make whole that which was broken. His teaching not only shared *information*. It initiated *transformation*.

But his act of healing the possessed man simply by speaking, also transformed the crowd that day. It says of the onlookers, that they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” I love how it says, “They *kept on* asking one another...” It’s like they couldn’t stop talking about what they had witnessed. Their reaction was like a tweet that was going viral.

The difference in the authority of what the scribes taught and the authority of Jesus’ teaching is comparable to the story of the difference between two men who stood on a stage and recited the twenty-third Psalm for an audience. One was a well-known actor, the other an old and not very sophisticated minister. The actor’s rendering of the psalm was beautiful and commanding. Everyone enjoyed hearing the rich words of the beloved Shepherd psalm spoken in his clear baritone. Every inflection and pause were perfect. When he finished, there was a stunned silence in the auditorium. You could almost imagine him dramatically dropping the mic and walking off-stage as a final punctuation to his mesmerizing delivery.

Then the old minister spoke. He stumbled over some of the words, and his reading lacked the precise diction and tone that made the actor’s delivery so appealing to the ear. But when he finished there were tears in the eyes of the listeners. The *impact* of his words on the crowd, more than the words themselves, was *his* mic drop moment. Something had happened and it was the actor who figured out what it was. “I know the psalm,” he said, “but this man knows the shepherd.”

The scribes knew the Psalms, the Law and the Prophets, and the rabbinic interpretations of scripture, backwards and forwards. But Jesus knew the *Shepherd* in a way that nobody else could. The source of Jesus’ authority was not a learned thing. It emanated from within him, growing out of his personal relationship to his heavenly Father.

When Jesus spoke, not only did people listen. When Jesus spoke, things happened. Something was set in motion.

When he was confronted with the man with unclean spirits, Jesus commanded, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing and crying with a loud voice, came out of the man.

—BOOM--Mic drop moment.

And this was not the only incidence when Jesus spoke and things *happened*.

Jesus spoke, and... Water turned to wine.

Jesus spoke and ...The sick became well.

Jesus spoke and...The blind saw.

Jesus spoke and... Storms were silenced.

Most of all, when Jesus spoke... people’s hearts were changed.

Jesus’ whole ministry was punctuated with mic drop moments.

Mark concludes his report on that day in Capernaum with the observation that, “At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.”

In the third chapter of Mark, Jesus assembles twelve of his disciples and names them apostles –which means those who are sent out to continue spreading the good news. Good news that they have not only *heard with their own ears*, but that *have seen with their own eyes*. Before he sends them out on their mission, he blesses them with the authority not only to preach, but to cast out demons, too. The authority of those apostles, like the authority of their teacher, was based on more than words. It was authorized and empowered by the experience of their relationship to him.

St. Francis once said, “Preach the Gospel at all times. *If necessary, use words.*” When we accept Jesus’ claim to authority in our lives, then the things Jesus taught – like loving your neighbor as yourself – will become to us more than *words* that we learn. They will be *actions* that we emulate. With time and faith, they will become a way of life. And as the gap between our words and our deeds is lessened, you and I will teach others what the kingdom of God is like, and *we* will do it with more than words. We will do it by example.

As Jesus’ disciples, we are still called and authorized to heal and bless the world in Christ’s name. We, in the United Church of Christ, believe in the “priesthood of *all* believers.” The committees you serve on, the classes you teach, whatever you do to serve the church, are actually ministries, and you are ministers. Ministers whose authority comes not necessarily through formal training or education, but through a direct and personal relationship to God in Jesus Christ.

Who knows what kind of astonishing, mic drop moments Jesus is waiting to leave on the stage of your life?

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Preached FCCW, January 31, 2021