

## THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Nicky Ing - 2th January 2006

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13; Mark 1:21-28**

Three weeks ago, on Sunday 8th January, we celebrated one Eucharist, partly because so many of you were away on holiday. It was however, a very special occasion, as three young children were baptized on that day and also, it was the feast of the Baptism of Christ. So we were very aware of the *power* of God's spirit at work, the disclosure of the voice of the Father, the presence of the Son, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which is the free gift of God's grace to *us* in our own baptism. Mark's Gospel, which is used during this year for many of our readings, is a fast-moving account of the work and teachings of Jesus and as I think I have mentioned before, it was the earliest Gospel to be written, so the other gospel writers, particularly Matthew and Luke, later used a good deal of Mark's material in their stories.

In this part of Mark Ch.1, we find a description of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. He has just been through his wilderness experience, where he has had to confront the powers of evil...Satan has tempted him, and he has overcome all those temptations...(all Mark says about this is that Jesus '*was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him...*' ) It is in Capernaum now, that Jesus first reveals himself as a healer and a teacher, and it is here too, that he will later have to face those who enter into open conflict with him. Although his ministry is at first welcomed with enthusiasm, by the end of this section the Pharisees and the Herodians will already be plotting to destroy him. Mark has explained already that Jesus' beginning to preach in Galilee is directly related to the arrest of John the Baptist...after John is handed over to the authorities, then Jesus' ministry begins... there is no suggestion of any rivalry between John and Jesus.

Capernaum was located on the north-west shore of the lake of Galilee...a border town along the main highway leading to Damascus...quite a large commercial centre...there were fishermen, farmers, merchants, tax-collectors and soldiers....quite a hub of activity, so it was a promising place for Jesus to begin his preaching ministry. The synagogue was used as a meeting place for the neighbourhood, perhaps rather like a small town hall. It also served as the local school, but mainly it was used as a prayer hall where people assembled on the Sabbath to hear the Scriptures and to pray. It wasn't presided over by priests...but by a group of laymen, elders, who appointed the local judges and teachers.

Mark tells us that Jesus entered the synagogue and taught the people, and that they were **ASTOUNDED** at his teaching because he taught with such **AUTHORITY**. Now, we know that Jesus' authority and power comes from his unique identity as the Son of God (revealed at his Baptism in the reading we used three weeks ago, when Jesus had been baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist). And that authority is now demonstrated to the people in the synagogue, in his command over the unclean spirit...an act of mercy towards the poor man who has no control over his body or his spirit; a man who is not in charge of his own life. When Jesus speaks, he firmly tells the power that dominates this

man's life to leave him alone.....and at Jesus' command, the man is freed....so the people are all **amazed** and marvel at Jesus' teaching, and they exclaim: '*here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.*' When he teaches, Jesus shares not only his wisdom, but his power....God's power which frees people from the evil forces that dominate their lives.

How do people in our society today, see the relation between words and deeds, between teaching and example? Many leaders in our time seem to advocate 'freedom' and 'rights' of the individual without any mention of duty or responsibility for the person's actions. Here in South Africa, we often see total disregard for others' safety, especially on the roads where our accident rate is appallingly high....we also see abuse of drugs and alcohol, and sadly, the tragic results of that....because these situations also can lead to the high rate of sexual abuse of women, and, tragically, small children. The statistics of this kind of abuse of children are terrifyingly high....it is a real evil in our society. (e.g.s known, here & elsewhere.....shocking numbers, traumatized people, esp. children ).

So as followers of Jesus, I believe that we too are called to confront the evils of our present-day society....in the loving way that Jesus would have done. We need to remember that by virtue of our own baptisms we too are *children of God*....we are to do God's work in our world, knowing that we have the power of God's Holy Spirit within us, to enable and strengthen us, to equip us for all the work that needs to be done, each in our own way and with our own particular gifting. Ultimately, we know that we are responsible to God, from whom all power and authority come. May we **never** use that power to manipulate or exploit others or force them into our way of thinking. And especially for those who are responsible for the lives of young people and their formation..... May the power that parents and also teachers exercise over children always be the power of love, gentleness,.....and understanding.

Lord, we ask today that what we have said with our lips, we may truly believe in our hearts, and practice in our lives. We ask it all in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN