

Jesus Expels an Unclean Spirit
Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. (English Standard Version – ESV)

Background:

- Most synagogues were community centers and places of prayer and study. When visiting teachers were present, synagogue leaders would invite them to lecture, especially on the Sabbath.
- Synagogue services were conducted by priests (known as "lay leaders" today), but those most skilled in the Scriptures undoubtedly contributed their share when they expounded God's word. Many local teachers were village scribes who also wrote down and interpreted legal documents. Most teachers would try to expound the law (usually from their Scripture reading) by explaining how to translate and apply it or by appealing to their traditions.
- The only recorded exorcist in the Old Testament was David (1 Samuel 16:23). Although wandering demons appear frequently in Jewish literature, the only demons that appear in the Gospels (except Satan; Mark 1:13) are in people they possess and, in one case, pigs (Mark 5:12).
- Demons or "unclean spirits" were often associated with magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names. If this demon is trying to subdue Jesus in this way ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in magical texts), as some scholars have suggested, the ploy does not work. Ancients often recognized that demons had access to supernatural knowledge, so it is not surprising that these demons perceive Jesus' true identity.
- "Holy One" was normally a title of God, but "Holy One of God," as used here, probably means something like "God's right-hand agent." In Jewish literature, demons recognized their inability to harm those who walked close to God.
- Exiting demons usually caused a commotion to make clear that they were leaving, regardless of the person who was casting them out.
- Exorcists expelled demons mainly by revolting or scaring them out, or invoking the name of a higher spirit to expel a lower one. Therefore, those witnessing this exorcism are understandably amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave.

Questions:

- + If Jesus taught “as one who had authority, and not as the scribes,” how did the scribes teach? Why do Mark and Luke focus on *how* Jesus taught in this passage rather than *what* he taught? What does it mean to speak with authority? What authority figures do you respect, and why?
- + How is it that demons believe Jesus to be the “Holy One of God, but those looking on do not? Do you believe Jesus is the “Holy One of God? Why or why not? How important is this?
- + Give some reasons why Jesus expelled the demons. What is the main reason, and why? Relate your reason why to their response... “What is this? A new teaching with authority!”
- + Because of the exorcism Jesus performed, Mark says, “At once his fame spread everywhere.” What would it take for you to spread the news about Jesus everywhere? Whom will you tell?