

Coming through the Holy Places



Sometimes a place feels holy because of rich cultural history, or it is built and adorned to inspire praise. But can people make places feel holy just by offering simple kindness? This week we see that it is often the people in a place that imbue it with holiness when they speak the truth in love.

Focus scripture: Mark 1:21–28

In Mark 1:21–28, Jesus shows up in a surprising way – as a teacher with a difference. The scribes of the day gathered their teaching skills through scholarship, knowledge, and studying precedence. Mark presents Jesus as one who teaches with the independent authority of God and the backing of his deeds. Jesus demonstrated a divine authority that had not been seen before and was perceived as a threat to the scribes. Jesus' treatment of the ill was amazing. His actions disrupted social norms. Social, political, and religious authorities came to view Jesus as a blasphemer and revolutionary.

The exorcism seems of secondary importance in this story. Jesus has the divine authority to drive out the unclean spirit living in the person he encountered in the synagogue – whatever the unclean spirit is. The healing amazed people who saw what happened, but they were more amazed by the authority with which Jesus acted.

When we think of a prophet, we might think of a person with special powers to see the future and predict what will occur in our lives. **Deuteronomy 18:15–20** describes one prophet in particular, “like you from among their own people...” This person is not charged with fortune-telling but instead is empowered to support the exhausted preachers as they continue their work among a disengaged assembly. A prophet will speak God's words in God's name, and God will hold everyone accountable. God's word can show up in surprising ways if that is what we need.

Epiphany can happen anywhere to anyone. **Psalm 111** lists the miraculous ways God shows up in the way we are nourished, the way we understand our cultural heritage, and the way we act justly toward one another in community.

This psalm informs our reading of **1 Corinthians 8:1–13**. If we come to the study of idolatry with compassion for those who are weak, then we become better friends and followers of Christ. The epistle explains that knowing right from wrong is not as important as knowing how to care for one another. Paul begs us not to wound one another with quick wit. He had personal experience with enforcing the spiritual law he studied before his conversion. He teaches the church in Corinth that they may feel tempted to outsmart each other. As we experience the fullness of love through the ways God provides for all of us, we learn to depend on one another so we may see God in new places and new people.

• • • • •

Prophecy, blessings, conversions, and teaching can occur on street corners, prisons, and shantytowns just as often as they occur in synagogues, temples, and chapels. Epiphany is not always a matter of where we encounter God; it may be a question of who journeys with us as we come through the holy places. Which begs the question, how are we a part of the holy places? Do we carry them within ourselves? What if the holiest places are not a church or cathedral but carried in our hearts and minds?

Focus scripture

Mark 1:21–28

Additional scriptures

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

Psalm 111

1 Corinthians 8:1–13

God of hearts and homes, be with us and within us so we may know the holiness of each person and place we encounter. Amen.

Lecture Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most children have had the experience of working with someone in a position of authority, such as, school teachers, coaches of sports teams, dance instructors, or summer camp leaders. Children may not be able to identify what gives authority to a teacher or a leader, but they know when a person has it—and when one does not. Older children may even have tried to exercise their own power and authority from time to time. There may be natural leaders among the children in the group who are able to exert a kind of peer power or authority over the others. While children know about the kind of authority that is based on position, strength, age, or place, in this week's session they will discover that the

power and authority of Jesus' ministry is different. It is an authority that is based on Jesus' relationship with God.

In this week's focus scripture is a story of miraculous healing. Most children, during these years, accept the miracle stories in the gospels without many questions. That unquestioning attitude begins to change as they approach adolescence. Some older children in your group may have lots of questions about this story. Encourage their questions as these will help them explore the story and their own beliefs more deeply. Sometimes the best answer is, "What do you think?" Pray that the children will discover a new understanding of true power and authority as demonstrated in Jesus' ministry.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Mark 1:21–28, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 75). Review the article "[The Gospel According to Mark](#)" (p. 105), if not reviewed earlier.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and *CD player*; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with a green cloth, Christ candle, Bible (with bookmark placed in focus passage), bowl, and a jug of water.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the "Circle Song" (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring *magnets* and a selection of *metal, paper, wooden, and plastic objects*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[Power and Authority](#)."

- ❑ **Bible research group:** bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[Learning about Mark](#)."
- ❑ **Rhythm poem group:** bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[Rhythm Poem](#)."

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** heavy drawing paper, crayons (coloured and black), pointed objects (sharp pencils or nails)
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** construction paper
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7), mural paper
- ❑ **Cooperation zone:** construction paper, pipe cleaners, vase, glitter (optional)
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** lengths of mural paper

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Scripture

Mark 1:21–28

January 31, 2021

Coming through the Holy Places

FOCUS To recognize Jesus as a powerful teacher and healer who builds community

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Remind children that we are in the Season after the Epiphany, a time when we hear stories about Jesus and the disciples.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and remind the group that the colour green marks this season of growing and learning about Jesus.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the “Circle Song” (p. 10 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Prayer ritual Come, let us remember God’s love poured out over all creation and us. (*Pour water into bowl.*)

Let us remember the light of God’s love, which Jesus brought to our world. (*Light the candle.*)

God’s love shines out for you and me. (*Invite the children to repeat this line after you.*)

Receive the offering and extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Show the group the magnets and objects and invite the children to experiment with these and notice the power of magnets to draw some objects closer. Comment that we can see the effects of magnetic energy even though the energy is invisible. Some people seem to have a special kind of energy that is like magnetic energy; it makes other people want to be near them. Jesus was that kind of person. Many people were drawn to him and liked to be near him.

Engage

Preparing for the Bible story

Recall that last week we heard the story of Jesus calling the fishers to be his first disciples. Andrew, Peter, James, and John recognized something special in Jesus so they left their boats and followed him. In this week’s story, others also recognize something special in Jesus in his response to someone who was ill. In Jesus’ time, people believed in the presence of evil powers (sometimes called “unclean spirits”) that could make a person ill.

The Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the focus passage, and explain that this week we will read another story about Jesus from the gospel of Mark. Use the resource sheet “[Power and Authority](#)” (based on **Mark 1:21–28**) to tell the

story. Discuss the following questions together:

- **What amazed the people in the synagogue when they heard Jesus teach?**
- **What did they say was new about Jesus’ teaching?**
- **What have you learned about Jesus from this story?**

Exploring the story further

(*To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.*)

Bible research group The children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about the gospel of Mark. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Learning about Mark](#)” and invite children to complete the page.

Rhythm poem group The children in this group will have an opportunity to experience the story of healing in today's focus passage by participating in a rhythm poem. Establish a clapping rhythm with the group and then invite the children to join in the poem on the resource sheet "[Rhythm Poem](#)" by repeating each phrase after you. Discuss together:

- **In what ways might the man's life have been different after his experience with Jesus?**

Reporting Invite the research group to share information about the gospel and members of the poem group to present the poem.

The Bible story and us

Jesus used his authority in a good way, to teach about God's way and to bring God's healing love to another.

- **What might we tell others about Jesus' powerful love?**
- **Where have you heard about or seen someone use authority in a good way, like Jesus?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Scratch art** Jesus' ministry revealed a way of using power and authority in loving ways. Invite children to create art images that could represent this. Have them to cover sheets of paper with solid blocks of colour, using different coloured crayons and pressing hard. Then have them use a black crayon to cover the entire sheet. Invite them to use a sharp object to "draw" a picture that portrays this week's story or presents an image of Jesus' power and authority, by lightly scratching away the black covering to reveal the colours beneath.

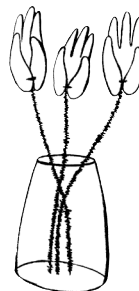
- **Quiet zone: Prayer reminders** Children can pray for people in need of healing. Distribute construction paper and invite children to each make several tracings of their hands and cut them out. Talk together about people or groups in their own city or in the world who need prayers. Have them print words or draw pictures on their hand shapes and take these home as reminders to pray for those people or situations.



- **Music zone: Song mural** The verses in the song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) speak of different ways of sharing God's love. Sing the song together several times. Ask a volunteer to lie down on a length of mural paper and trace around their shape. Talk together about ways we can use our voices, hands, and

hearts to share God's love. Invite the children to print or draw their ideas on the different parts of the body shape.

- **Cooperation zone: Hand bouquet** Invite children to create a bouquet of "hand flowers" as a reminder that God wants us to live together in love. Help children trace around their hands on construction paper and cut out the shapes. Have them decorate their hand shapes with markers, crayons, and glitter (if desired). Help children form their hand shapes into flower shapes by taping a pipe cleaner to the base of the hand shape and stapling together the thumb and small finger. Place the "hand flowers" into a vase and place the bouquet in the worship space.



- **Outreach zone: Paper hug** In today's story, Jesus hugged the man and helped him feel better. When they can't give a hug in person, children can make paper hugs to send to someone who is feeling lonely or sad. Have children take turns lying on a length of mural paper with arms outstretched, and trace around each arm. Have them cut out their "hugs" and decorate them with words and drawings to show love and care (such as, heart shapes). Invite parents to help children decide to whom to send their paper hugs.



Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the candle. Invite children to spend a few quiet moments thinking of the people in their communities who need someone to help them, as did the man in today's story.

Pray Thank you God for Jesus,
who shared your message of love with everyone
he met.
Thank you for calling us to help share your love
too. Amen.

Sing, if possible, the song "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), remember to follow Jesus' example and use your power to help others."

Reflect

How did the children understand Jesus' power and authority? In what ways do you see the children in the group offering care and kindness to another? How has this story of Jesus' ministry challenged your understanding of who Jesus is?



Power and Authority

(based on Mark 1:21–28)

**In a dramatic story like this one,
begin with a quiet voice and
get louder as the
story builds.**

Jesus continued to travel around Galilee, teaching and healing. Simon, Andrew, James, and John travelled with him, as did others who were called disciples of Jesus. They wanted to learn more from Jesus about telling and showing God's love.

One day Jesus and the disciples were in a town by the Sea of Galilee called Capernaum (KA-PER'-NA-UMM). On the sabbath day, the holy day for the Jews, they went to the synagogue in Capernaum. Because Jesus was a guest, he was invited to read the Scriptures. After reading, Jesus taught the people about what had been read. The people were surprised because Jesus taught like the people who spent all their time studying the Scriptures. But they could see that Jesus was like themselves. Where did Jesus get this authority?

As Jesus was teaching, someone made a lot of noise, disturbing everyone. Quite a commotion! "What are you doing here?" shouted someone. "I know you. You are the Holy One of God! What do you want from us?

Leave us alone!"

Everyone looked at the person who was shouting and then at Jesus. Jesus looked straight into the man's eyes. Pain and anger showed in the man's face. Jesus' love looked right into that pain and anger. "Be silent. Come out of him," Jesus said to all that pain and anger.

Then the man began to shake, hard. He screamed and fell to the ground. Jesus continued to look at the man. Then the man became quiet. The pain and anger were gone.

The people in the room couldn't believe what they had seen. "What is this?" "How did Jesus do that?" "Where does Jesus get this power and authority?"

It was clear that Jesus was no ordinary teacher or healer. Jesus spoke and acted with an amazing power, a power that came from God. This was a power of love, of caring for the lonely and the hurting. This power and authority brought people closer to God and to one another.

When the crowd left, they told other people about Jesus and they told still more people. Wherever Jesus went after that, people came. Jesus attracted people like a magnet attracts metal.



LEARNING ABOUT MARK

Choose one answer to complete each statement. The letters for your answers will complete the sentence at the bottom of the page and tell you something about the gospel of Mark. Feel free to check your Bible!

The gospel of Mark tells the story of

M *Mark*

N *Moses*

O *Jesus*

The gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel. It has

J *5 chapters*

K *12 chapters*

L *16 chapters*

The first person to appear in the gospel of Mark is

D *John the baptizer*

E *Jesus*

F *Mark*

The first story about Jesus in the gospel of Mark is

D *Jesus' birth*

E *Jesus' baptism*

F *Jesus' first birthday*

The first thing Jesus does in the gospel of Mark is

Q *heals a woman*

R *eats breakfast*

S *calls disciples*

The story of Jesus feeding thousands of people is in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

In Mark, it is in chapter

S *4*

T *6*

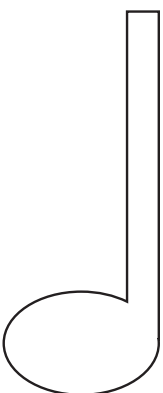
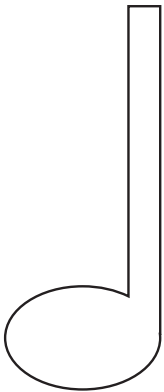
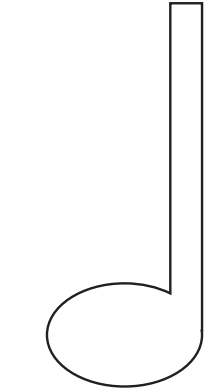
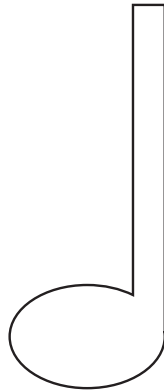
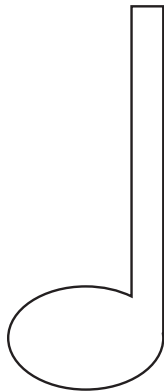
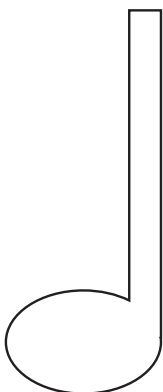
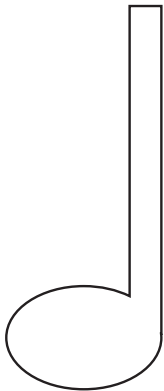
U *9*

Mark is the _____ gospel.



RHYTHM POEM

(based on Mark 1: 21–28)



Something in me / hurt so badly.
Would I ever / again be happy?
No one liked me. / No one loved me.
No one thought / a nice thought of me.
Then one day / along came Jesus.
Spoke to me. / Cured my illness.
Now I'm happy. / Now I'm fine.
Now my little / light can shine.
Peace and love / have come to me.
I'm now part / of God's family.
Jesus heals / the sick and sad.
Jesus makes them / very glad.
Jesus' power / comes from love.
It's Jesus / I'll be talking of.
Praises be / to God most high.
May all feel joy / as much as I.
Amen. / Thank God. / Amen.

The Gospel according to Mark

By William Loader

Mark, the shortest gospel, written probably around 70 CE, set the pattern for the others to follow. After just 13 verses, it gets us into Jesus' ministry straightaway, with no Christmas stories; probably not even knowing them, because Mark's Mary does not really understand who Jesus is (3:20–21). Straight off the plane we hit main street: the baptism scene tells us most of what matters (1:9–11). Heaven is meeting earth, the divine, the human. The Spirit is on Jesus. Jesus is God's son. Foreshadowing the later doctrine of the Trinity, it is as though it holds out a sign saying: "Expect God in what follows!"

The temptations follow (1:12–13), giving us our first major clue why all this is good news and why people called the whole writing a good-news-thing, "a gospel." For there, Jesus confronts Satan. Announcing the reign of God (1:14–15) means announcing liberation from the demonic powers that oppress people. Thus, Jesus' first action after making recruits is to free a man from his demons (1:21–28). Mark, as they came to call the gospel's anonymous writer in the second century, used that world's concepts to describe what we might describe in other terms; but the impact of the good news is very clear in the stories the writer tells. Jesus' actions bring healing, physical and spiritual, restore the marginalized and the self-marginalized to community, and create good news on the ground in actions and words that speak of love and forgiveness, already offered freely to all by John the Baptizer (1:4–5).

Mark's stories show that some people found Jesus' approach annoying, because he gave such priority to human need above other biblical commands, such as Sabbath and purity laws (2:1–3:6). These conflicts reflect tensions both from Jesus' day and from later

times. Mark is closest to Paul in concluding that you cannot impose biblical requirements in all situations, especially as the movement spread outside its originally Jewish culture. Circumcision had to go, as did much else. Mark cleverly employs the feedings of the 5000 and 4000 as symbols of Jesus offering bread to both Jews and Gentiles (6:30–44; 8:1–9, 14–21). The gospel writer's take on one of Jesus' sayings (7:15) suggests that biblical laws about clean and unclean food never did make sense because food just enters the stomach and then the toilet (7:17–23). Matthew and Luke see it differently.

Mark uses stories symbolically. So on either side of the three occasions when Jesus announces that his is the path of serving and facing suffering and the disciples fail to grasp it (8:31–33; 9:31–34; 10:32–45), we find Jesus healing the blind (8:22–26; 10:46–52)! Mark's most confronting statement about greatness in leadership and life is in his account of Jesus' death. Is he the anointed one (the messiah), the king, the Son of God? Yes, he is (8:27; 14:61–62), but his throne is a cross and his crown is made of thorns! The writer of the gospel of Mark was obviously not taken in by Roman propaganda about the emperor as son of God and bearer of "good news." The message is subversive.

Mark appears to have deliberately painted the disciples as failures (8:21; 14:50), perhaps because they were, perhaps as an educational strategy to challenge believers in the writer's own time. Women disciples, whom he largely neglects until at the cross (15:40–41), do much better, but even they fail in the end (16:8). Yet pessimism and cynicism are not Mark's goal. For his story makes it clear that it did not stop at the women's silence (13:9–10). Something must have turned it around. God turned it around, so that the other side of the disciples' failure is faith in the generosity of God, who despite their failures is prepared to get Peter and the disciples, women and men, back on their feet (16:7). That remains good news for us all.

William Loader is Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Murdoch University, and Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia.

