

## Words of power: Mark 1.21-34

*Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*



*And they were all amazed, and they kept asking one another, What is this? A new teaching — with authority!*

Capernaum: just an ordinary lakeside fishing village, filled with ordinary people doing everyday things — praying, cooking, working, eating, bringing up kids, getting on with their neighbours (or not). Decent, hardworking people: some seriously respectable, some decidedly shady, many broken and distressed.

Capernaum is a microcosm of human society — and into it, like a stone tossed into a pool, comes Jesus. And with him come the disciples, puzzled but loyal, following, trying to keep up, taking it all in.



The synagogue in Capernaum is an impressive building that dominates the town. What you see today dates from the fourth century AD, some 300 years after Jesus' time: the remains of a very grand white limestone building, with graceful pillars, spacious paved floor, and fine carvings. Underneath it, you can plainly see the foundations of an earlier building from the time of Jesus, built of the local black basalt, but still grander than anything else in this little town. Everything about this building says, "I have authority" — the authority of size, the authority of power and wealth.



But Jesus too speaks with authority, an authority that is instantly recognisable, even (perhaps especially) to a man whose disability makes him extra sensitive to the spirit world (v.24). So, right from the outset, Mark poses the question: what kind of authority does Jesus have, and where does he get it from? We know the

answer, if we've been paying attention as the story unfolds. Jesus is God's Son (v.1), anointed with God's Holy Spirit (v.11). He's been in the desert (which to most people in Jesus' world was the abode of demons), and emerged unscathed (vv.12-13). And he's announced in public that his mission is to proclaim that God's Kingdom is breaking into our ordinary everyday world. That's good news, says Jesus (vv.14-15) — but not for the forces of disorder that bring disturbance and distress into people's lives.

So in this first encounter, Jesus faces bafflement and hostility. "What have you got to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" says something like: you don't belong here, we don't need you. But Capernaum does need Jesus — it's full of people who need to be liberated from whatever it is that's holding them hostage, preventing them from discovering their full potential as beloved children of God and citizens of God's Kingdom.



From the synagogue, Jesus goes straight (*immediately* again!) to Simon Peter's family home (v.29). Today the site of Peter's house is a glass-and-steel church, sitting like a space capsule astride the foundations of a first-century house, inside a house church, inside a pilgrim church from the sixth century AD. It feels a bit like the Tardis, travelling back in time through centuries of Christian devotion to the fisherman's house where it all began. Within a stone's throw of the synagogue you can see a jumble of first-century housing with small, claustrophobic rooms, built of the rounded boulders of local black basalt. No marble halls or elegant carving here — just the decent, hardworking dwellings you'd expect of a fishing family that owns its own boat (but not much more).

So when Simon and Andrew come home with three extra guests for supper, it must have caused a bit of consternation. Especially when Grandma is laid up in bed with the fever — just when she wanted to help her daughter put on a special dinner for the guests. You can imagine the agitated, embarrassed whispering in corners — until they decide to do the only sensible thing and tell Jesus (v.30). So Jesus takes her by the hand and gives her back the dignity of being able to offer hospitality to her guests (v.31). But no chance of a quiet evening — suddenly there's a whole new congregation pressing around the door, crowding into the narrow street to bring their sick for healing (vv.32-34).

*Question: What did Simon and Andrew feel, looking back at the end of Day One (v.32)? What did Grandma feel? What have they learnt, on this first day of following Jesus? Where have you seen evidence of God's Kingdom at work?*

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