

Scripture

Mark 1:21-28

Speaking with Power

**Jesus proclaims good news even when it leads to conflict.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus speaks with compassion and power, healing a troubled man in the synagogue. Bystanders angrily challenge his demonstration of authority.
- ◆ Young children have many fears they long to overcome with power.
- ◆ In today's session we can affirm their fears, and God's willingness to help them overcome those fears.

Question of the Week

What does Jesus' power over demons or care for the paralyzed man teach me?

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started
- ◆ Gospel Story: Come Out!
(optional: stuffed animal)
- ◆ Roleplay
- ◆ Praying Together

Enrichment

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together
- ◆ Art: Imaginary Monsters (*flat toothpicks, packing peanuts, paperclips, pebbles, craft sticks, pipe cleaners, other odds and ends*)
- ◆ Movement: Scary vs. Peaceful (*colored cloths or scarves*)
- ◆ Book Corner: Scary vs. Peaceful
- ◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
- ◆ Our Catholic Heritage: What Did the Messiah Promise in the New Covenant?
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Jesus' Public teaching

✓ Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Children think of things to do when they are scared. Help the children perceive their own power to deal with fear. This power is God's gift to God's people.

Sit with the children in a circle. Ask the children to name scary things. Examples:

- ◆ dogs
- ◆ the dark
- ◆ thunder and lightning
- ◆ monsters

Ask:

- ◆ What can we do when we are scared?

Welcome the children's ideas. Add your own only as necessary:

- ◆ hold a grown-up's hand
- ◆ turn on a night light
- ◆ hold a favorite doll or stuffed animal
- ◆ take a deep breath
- ◆ say Jesus' name

Affirm for the children that Jesus is with us, even when we are scared.

✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Come Out!

Focus: For today's story, you can use a stuffed animal that looks like a childish monster, such as the animals based on the characters in Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are. (See the Book Corner activity on p. 4.)

One day Jesus meets a man with an evil spirit in him. The man is wild and crazy because of the evil spirit.

The evil spirit screams at Jesus, "What do you want, Jesus? Have you come to get rid of us?"

Jesus is not afraid. He says, "Be quiet. Go away. Come out of that man and leave that man alone."

The evil spirit shakes the man. The evil spirit gives a loud scream. The evil spirit does not want to leave that man alone!

But there is nothing the evil spirit can do. Jesus has spoken. The evil spirit leaves, forever.

"Oh, Jesus," says the man. "I do not feel wild. I do not feel crazy. I feel good all over. Thank you, Jesus! You are stronger than any scary thing!"

✓ Roleplay (5-10 minutes)

Children roleplay scary situations, learning that Jesus is always near.

Sit with the children in a circle. Say:

- ◆ Jesus is near us when we are scared.
- ◆ Let's play a game that reminds us that Jesus is near.

First invite the children to name scary things. See today's Getting Started activity for possible ideas.

When a child suggests a scary thing, such as a barking dog, help all the children act out that scary thing, for example, by growling and barking. After a moment say in a strong, clear voice, "Jesus is near."

When you say, "Jesus is near," the children stop their roleplay and link arms around the circle, joining you in saying over and over, "Jesus is near." Children can experience Jesus' peace descend on the group as they gradually quiet themselves. Repeat the sequence as long as interest is sustained.

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather children in a circle. Invite the children to recall scary times. Encourage the children to respond to each scary time named with the affirmation:

- ◆ Jesus is here.

Then invite children to recall happy, peaceful times. Encourage the children to respond to each peaceful time named with the affirmation:

- ◆ Jesus is here.

Close by praying:

- ◆ Thank you, Jesus, for being with us in good times and bad. *Amen.*

Note: Distribute this week's *At Home with the Good News* to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.

☐ Discover the Good News

(5-10 minutes)

In today's *Discover the Good News* you'll find an illustrated version of today's story. You'll also find a story starter they can use to explore how to handle their fears.

☐ Singing Together (10-15 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News*, sing together:

- ◆ "Listen for the Voice of the Lord" (songbook p. 24, also available as an MP3)
- ◆ "Teacher and Healer" (songbook p. 27, also available as an MP3)

Together with the Baptism Exploration activity that is attached to this document, you may also sing:

- ◆ "Water, Cool and Clear" (songbook p. 26)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*.

The rhythm of "Water, Cool and Clear" makes it a good choice for children's movement activities. Give each child a colored cloth or scarf—shades of blue would be especially appropriate.

Children wave the scarves as they dance and sway in rhythm with these words of the song "Water, Cool and Clear":

*Water, cool and clear,
Water, flowing free.
Water, cool and clear,
Bring new life to me.*

☐ Art (5-15 minutes)

Imaginary Monsters

Many young children will welcome this opportunity to make imaginary monsters. However, offer other options, too, so that children who would be frightened by making monsters can choose a more reassuring option.

Set out lumps of play dough. Invite each child to take a lump as you explain:

- ◆ You can use your play dough to make an imaginary monster.
- ◆ You can use your play dough to make Jesus.
- ◆ You can use your play dough to make any person you like.

Set out the other materials, encouraging children to make creative use of them. Paper clips can be bent into antennae. Packing peanuts can become ears.

Children can save their finished sculptures to use in the Movement activity below.

☐ Movement (5-15 minutes)

Scary vs. Peaceful

Activity Soundtrack: For this activity, you may wish to use two pieces of recorded music, one wild and one peaceful. For the wild music, we suggest "Oh Happy Day;" for the peaceful music, we suggest "Heal the Earth" or "Dona Nobis Pacem." (Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.) Be sure to end the passage with peaceful music.

Seat children in a circle. The children should bring to the circle the sculptures made in the Art activity above. Each child can also choose one colored cloth or scarf.

Explain that you will first play wild music. Children can make a "monster dance" by holding their monster sculptures as they dance, stomp and growl. You will then play peaceful music. Children can make a "peace dance" by using their colored cloths as they sway and dance to the music.

Stress these points:

- ◆ You do not have to do both dances. You can just sit and watch the monster dance or the peace dance.
- ◆ Dance alone—no touching or bumping. (*This rule is important, because wild dancing sometimes leads to aggressive dancing.*)

Play first the wild music for 2-3 minutes. Bring the piece to a close by gradually reducing volume. Then play the peaceful music for 2-3 minutes.

□ Book Corner (5-15 minutes)

Scary vs. Peaceful

Note: Before class visit the children's section of a library to select one or more picture books about monsters. We recommend:

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak. (New York: Harper, 1963). This picture book has been a favorite of young children for thirty years. The boy Max, sent to his room for wild behavior, sails to a land full of wild things. At first Max enjoys ruling the rumpus, but later he chooses to return to the love that awaits him at home. Of the three books we recommend, this book bears the closest affinity to today's gospel.

My Mama Says, There Aren't Any Zombies, Ghosts, Vampires, Creatures, Demons, Monsters, Fiends, Goblins, or Things by Judith Viorst. Illustrations by Kay Choroa. (New York: Atheneum, 1973). This humorous book accurately identifies young children's fears and their skepticism at parental reassurances. The book affirms the safety of the child when a loving parent is near.

The Funny Little Woman by Arlene Mosel. Illustrated by Blair Lent. (New York: Dutton, 1972). In this charming tale adapted from the Japanese, a "funny little woman" outsmarts the terrible oni.

Children hear one or more stories about monsters and talk about scary times.

Read the book or books you have chosen aloud to the children. Invite the children to comment on scary things found in the book or books. Ask:

- ◆ What other scary things can you name?

INFO Young Children and the Gospel

In today's gospel, Jesus demonstrates his authority over the powers of evil by ordering an evil spirit to come out of a possessed man. Children might compare this wild, lawless spirit to the imaginary monsters that haunt their closets at bedtime.

Adults are often reluctant to initiate conversation about monsters or other scary topics, but children invariably find that the opportunity to openly discuss their secret worries diminishes the power of their fears. A young child's fears can include dogs, darkness, loud noises, insects, monsters, storms and—worst of all—separation from parents. Your faith formation group may be one of the few places a child can openly discuss such fears without being teased or told, "Oh, it's nothing. You don't need to be afraid of that."

INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - A copy of today's *Gospel Story: Come Out!*, which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
 - Instructions for one of this season's *Baptism Exploration* activities.
 - For catechists, an informative article on *Learning Styles*.
- ◆ Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Winter-B's *Models of the Faith*.
 - An article for catechists and/or families further exploring *The Gospel of Mark*.
 - An article for catechists and/or families on *Prophets and Prophecy*.
 - For catechists and/or families, an *Epiphany Overview*.

More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings explore the scope and meaning of God's authority. In Deuteronomy, Moses encourages the people to listen to God's prophet and thus heed God's word. Paul explains that true obedience to the law must be balanced by love and compassion. In today's gospel, Jesus demonstrates his divine authority by healing a man with an unclean spirit.

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Today's passage describes the role of the prophet to make known God's will, a role distinct from the pagan

"In some traditions, such as Judaism, teacher is just about all. Moses was the great teacher and Jewish history is the story of teachers ever since. In Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth arose as a teacher; 'rabbi' is the least controversial title applied to him in the New Testament."

—Gabriel Moran
*Religious Education
As a Second Language*

practices of fortune telling, communication with the dead and divination.

This passage validates prophetic practice by telling how Moses establishes a succession of prophets to mediate as he did between God and the people. A criterion is established to aid in distinguishing the true prophet from the false.

In the postexilic period, when prophetic activity ceased, the statement about the raising of "a prophet like me" (v. 15) was interpreted as the promise of a "prophet like Moses" to come in the last days. The early Church saw this fulfilled in Jesus.

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

In today's reading, Paul builds on the principle laid out in the preceding verses: Do not become so engrossed in this world's priorities that you lose your sense of spiritual urgency. In spite of Paul's negative comparison of celibate and married Christians, he is not maliciously eager to rob the Corinthians of the joys of marriage. Here Paul clearly states his motive as he discusses the advantages of celibacy: "I want you to be free from anxieties" (v. 32).

Marriage, Paul asserts, may complicate life, bring on a host of earthly afflictions and introduce a new set of concerns that tend to divert the believer from an undistracted "devotion to the Lord" (v. 35).

It is important to keep Paul's intense mission in mind while reading these verses. Paul is not depreciating the many benefits of marriage, and he is not denying the sacramental value of a marital relationship. He is simply pointing out that, for the Corinthians at this time, celibacy may be the most advantageous choice.

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus' teaching in the synagogue and freeing a person possessed by a demon in the synagogue illustrate the nature of Jesus' message. Mark emphasizes Jesus' activity as teacher, but in contrast to Matthew and Luke, he gives less of the content of Jesus' teaching. Rather, he stresses Jesus' effective, powerful authority.

One manifestation of this authority is Jesus' exorcism of an unclean spirit. Mark does not tell miracle stories just for the sake of arousing awe. He tells them to give witness to the meaning of Jesus' presence.

In the Old Testament, the title *holy one* is used pre-eminently of God, but the same words are also applied to humans. As applied to Jesus, the term takes on the meaning of one who uniquely reveals God's power.

In the first half of this gospel (1:1–8:26), Jesus teaches in veiled language (4:11), through action and parable. The authority of his "new teaching" (v. 27) is seen in its effect on others. Matthew's description of the crowd's reaction to the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 7:28) is in Mark their response to Jesus' total self-presentation. His authority is manifested in his deeds.

Reflection

Much of what is touted as compelling teaching today is often derivative. We yawn at political rhetoric or the latest self-help guru because we've heard it before. Nothing in the hype is really new. We can easily empathize with the folks who strolled into the Capernaum synagogue not expecting much more than "déjà vu all over again."

Then Jesus begins to speak, and the room becomes intensely quiet. People are raptly attentive, astonished. His words obliterate their nagging worries, anxieties and fears. He restores their childlike wonder. Then he follows words with action: confronting the demon.

He continues to confront, answering the question, "What have you to do with us, Jesus?" by responding, "Everything." Anywhere that people are denied their full humanity, oppressed by the forces of corporate

profit or arrogant government, Jesus stands in opposition. Just as he restores the peace of the man possessed, so he seeks always to bring human beings into his peace.

How do we respond? With the skepticism of those who questioned a “new” teaching, bound to be dangerous? Or with the honest joy and admiration of the people who helped to spread Jesus’ fame throughout Galilee?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Authority points to the ability to influence or control the behavior of others. God’s authority is absolute because God is the creator and ruler over all creation (*CCC*, #268–71, 279–81). Human authority is related to the essential governance of the Church (*CCC*, #553, 874, 894–96) and of society (*CCC*, #1897–1904). The response to legitimate authority is obedience, which is rooted in our attentive listening to the Word of God and our eagerness to order our lives according to this Word (*CCC*, #144–149).

Our Catholic Heritage

What Did the Messiah Promise in the New Covenant?

What does “the kingdom of God” mean to a people who have been shaped by democracy, egalitarianism, individualism and self-sufficiency? What does it mean to live under the reign of God? What kind of a king is God, anyhow? These are the questions that arise when we really wish to integrate our schedules and career goals with our faith and relationship with God. This kingdom is best described by Jesus in his many parables: “The kingdom of God is like...” Jesus teaches us what life in God’s kingdom is like and what “life in all its fullness” would look like.

Jesus says that the kingdom of God is here and now, among us (Luke 17:20-21). It is in the office next to us, in the seat next to us, in the home next to us, in our own homes. Jesus says that the kingdom of God demands perfect righteousness (Matthew 5:20). This righteousness has more to do with the heart’s harmony with the will of God than with scrupulous lawfulness. Obedience is the outward fruit of inner harmony.

The kingdom of God belongs to God. It is God’s to give (Luke 12:32), God’s to hide or disguise (Matthew 13:31-33), God’s to sort out and oversee (Matthew 13:24-30), and God’s to fill (Luke 14:16-24).

The kingdom of God belongs to those who are as humble and defenseless and dependent as a child (Mark 10:13-16) or a sheep (John 10:3-4). Power and pride and possessions—the privileges of adulthood—have no place in God’s kingdom.

Such descriptions, and many more like them, show us the kingdom of God that Jesus promised. Some don’t find such promises enticing. Others are willing to give up everything in order to gain such a kingdom.

The World of the Bible

Jesus’ Public Teaching

As a teacher, Jesus gathered to himself a group of like-minded men who formed his band of disciples. His public teaching, which is described in the gospels, was conducted almost exclusively in the public world of men—in the synagogue meeting houses, the open fields, along the lakeshore, at meals with other men, in the squares of local villages and in the temple at Jerusalem—and was usually in dialogue with other males.

He seldom appeared in the realm of women (but see John 4:5–27 for his interaction with a Samaritan woman at the village well and his disciples’ astonishment). He answered women’s questions only as a courtesy because the inferior status of women prohibited them from entering into the honor controversies that were open only to males.

Much of his teaching occurred through questions and answers that were highly charged with honor implications. Every question, if it could be answered correctly and cleverly, acquired honor for the teacher. If the teacher could not answer or answered poorly, he was dishonored and shown up for his incompetence.

This competitive, contentious attitude was the reason why Jesus’ opponents constantly tried to bait and trap him into not answering or saying something foolish. The gospels portray Jesus as a teacher with a razor-sharp wit, whose clever answers and memorable one-liners certainly delighted his first-century audience as much as they do us today.