



# A New Teaching—with Authority!

MARK 1:21-28

They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

Mark 1:22

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## Quick prep

This text presents Jesus' first public actions in the Gospel of Mark. A lot has already happened: Jesus has been baptized by John and tested by Satan, and he has called his first disciples. Now, for the first time, we see how a group of everyday people respond to Jesus' words and actions. Curiously, Mark gives no indication of what Jesus taught. Instead of the content of Jesus' words, the gospel points us to a demonstration of his power: his encounter with an unclean spirit. This scripture text also introduces a motif that will recur throughout Mark's gospel: Mark lets us, the readers, know something that the characters in the story don't. From the demon's exclamation, we learn that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (1:24), but the people of the synagogue are left wondering: "What is this?" (1:27).

Your group may experience similar puzzlement. There may be questions as to what Jesus' teaching was. They may struggle with how to deal with the prominence of the demonic in the text. Be prepared to invite them into these questions not as problems to be solved but as mysteries to be wrestled with.

- ✦ One of the challenges in discussing Mark is that participants often want to turn the discussion to other gospels they are more familiar with. At times, you may need to redirect the conversation toward the scripture text at hand.
- ✦ The first session is a good place to set expectations. Use the reading as an opportunity to note that Jesus puzzled people in the first century and still puzzles us in the twenty-first century. Jesus comes to us with both clarity and mystery. Encourage the group to lean into the mystery and to ask big questions without easy answers.

## SUPPLIES

- ◆ Paper and pens or pencils
- ◆ A candle and matches
- ◆ Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*
- ◆ Something to keep time, such as a watch or phone

## Gather (15 to 30 minutes)

- ✦ A key topic of discussion in today's reading is teaching, teachers, and teaching styles. Keep in mind that participants may have had different experiences as students, some of which may have been very positive and some very negative. Name that reality and give participants permission to share their negative experiences if they wish.

### CHECK IN

Distribute paper and writing utensils and introduce the prompts:

1. Their name
2. Why they decided to join in this Together by Grace Bible Conversation
3. The name of a teacher who was influential in their life and what that person taught them

Give the group some time to ponder and to write down why the teacher they named was influential in their lives. Let them know that they will be invited to share their reflections on the third prompt during the community-building exercise later on.

After folks are done writing, begin by sharing your answers to the first two prompts. Invite each group member to do the same.

### OPENING PRAYER

**O God, source of all goodness: Bless our study, that it might be a space of learning and safety where we are both teachers and students of each other. Challenge our minds and nurture our hearts; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.** (Adapted from *ELW*, p. 78)

- ✦ During your discussion on teaching styles, there may be sharp generational differences in what is considered “good” teaching. It may be helpful to remind participants that the discussion isn't about what teaching style is best but about how we've reacted to different teachers in our lives.

### COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Introduce the group covenant. If you are able, light a candle as a mark of the sacred nature of the covenant. Then give folks a moment to silently read the group covenant on page 9 in their guides (page 8 in this guide). Afterward, invite a volunteer to read the three goals out loud. Then read the guidelines out loud together, embodying the “we” of the covenant. Remind the group of the importance of hearing and respecting every voice and keeping personal information confidential. You may extinguish the candle as a transition to the next part of the activity or keep it lit throughout the session as a reminder of God's presence with you as you read scripture together.

After giving participants a moment to review what they wrote, invite them to share about their influential teacher. If no one is interested in sharing, you can lead the group in a short discussion of what they find helpful about teachers and teaching styles in general.

## Dwell (20 to 40 minutes)

### DWELLING IN THE WORD

Invite volunteers to read the four “parts” in this text:

- ♦ The narrator
- ♦ Jesus
- ♦ The unclean spirit
- ♦ The crowd (this could be read by the whole group)

Give readers an opportunity to clarify where their part begins and ends and to ask about the pronunciation of any unfamiliar words.

#### Mark 1:21-28

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup>At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

### CONVERSATION

1. As you work through the prompts, remember that some folks will have responses immediately and others will need more time to think. At the beginning of the conversation, give the group time to read through the prompts and to write down any notes or thoughts before opening things up for discussion.
2. When working with a map of an unfamiliar locale, it’s always helpful to point out the scale at the bottom. Note that Jerusalem and Galilee are only about seventy miles apart. Have participants name some places that are seventy miles away from your location to contextualize that distance.
3. If the discussion of teachers in the community-building exercise was fruitful, return to some of the themes that you discussed and reframe them in the context of the text for this session.

✦ The first session is a good opportunity to gauge the group’s familiarity with the Gospel of Mark and the ancient world of first-century Judea. Do not assume that folks will be familiar with how to pronounce words like *synagogue* and *Sabbath* or with place names like Capernaum and Galilee.

✦ This text discusses unclean spirits and the demonic. Depending on your context, participants may find this topic unsettling or confusing. If the group is getting stuck on the literal, or “what really happened,” it may be helpful to encourage participants to think about “the world the scripture text creates.”

✦ You may have folks in your group who have visited the Holy Land. If so, you could invite them to share about their experience of the geography of the land.

✦ Some participants may have heard theories linking ancient conceptions of the demonic to modern mental illnesses. Remind the group that we can’t diagnose the man through the scripture text and that those associations have at times had harmful effects on those who suffer from mental illness.

4. This prompt is a good opportunity to switch things up. You could ask folks to raise their hands if they identify with certain characters (Jesus, the man with the unclean spirit, the amazed crowd); then ask if anyone would be willing to share why they raised their hand for a particular character.

## Engage (10 to 20 minutes)

### WORD AND SERVICE

Remind participants of the date, time, and location of the next session, and encourage them to invite someone new to join.

As you introduce the activity in the participant guide, invite participants to consider one thing they will remember or do this week.

### WORSHIP AND PRAYER

If you extinguished your candle earlier, light it again as a transition to a time of worship and prayer. If your group is gathering virtually or in a hybrid model, invite those attending online to light a candle as well.

1. Reflection: Invite participants to think about people and situations in their lives that they wish to pray for.
2. Silent intercession: Introduce this section with the formula, “Loving God, in the silence of our hearts, we lift up our prayers, both known and unknown.” After an appropriate span of silence, conclude with, “Lord, hear our prayers.” You could also invite participants to formulate additional petitions that give thanks for a particular lesson that they learned from the Gospel of Mark during this session.
3. Devotional hymn: “Unexpected and mysterious,” ELW 258, stanzas 1 and 3. If your group is musical, you can sing the hymn, but there’s also a long Lutheran tradition of reading hymns as prose devotions. Read the verses together as a group or have volunteers read aloud.
4. Closing prayer: **Almighty God, you have enriched your church with Mark’s proclamation of the gospel. Give us grace to believe firmly in the good news of salvation and to walk daily in accord with it, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.** (ELW, p. 55)

### LOOKING AHEAD

Since this is the first session, walk participants through the Suggestions for Going Deeper and Looking Ahead material in their guides. If you haven’t already done so, remind them of the location, date, and time of the next session.

