



Western Fells Methodist Circuit

**31 January 2021**

**Short Written  
Reflective Service**

**by  
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Some words from Mark 1:22 for us to think on at the start of this service.

*The people were amazed at his teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*

As I prepared to share my service in November the country had just moved into the second national lockdown. Now here we are after a month of a third lockdown. We can, I am sure, be forgiven for struggling at times. So, I offer as an opening hymn two verses from Horatius Bonar's "I heard the voice of Jesus say," for us to reflect on.

Video [here](#)

I heard the voice of Jesus say :  
'Come unto me and rest ;  
lay down, O weary one, lay down  
your head upon my breast.'  
I came to Jesus as I was,  
weary and worn and sad,  
I found in him a resting-place,  
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say :  
'I am this dark world's Light ;  
look unto me, your morn shall rise,  
and all your day be bright.'  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
in him my star, my sun ;  
and in that light of life I'll walk,  
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808–1889)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, 248

Inspired by the light and love of Christ let us put our anxieties and weariness to one side and come to God in prayer:

**Lord God**, we come into your presence, just as we are, seeking to praise and worship you as best we can. We adore you and despite everything are constantly amazed by the way you bless us. At this time of year in the darkness and cold of winter we marvel at the wonders of your creation and the power of the elements. Your hand is in the starkness of the mountains, the roar of the sea, the lashing of the wind and the chill of the rain and sleet. Wherever we look you have been at work, in the patterns of a frosted scene, the feathers of a bird's wing and the new shoots of spring. We praise you and give you thanks for all that you do for us. We wonder at your love for us, a love displayed in so

many ways. A love that accepts us, making no demands but reaches out to us constantly and unconditionally.

Forgive us Father for we are unworthy of such love. We fail you in so many ways. We do not love others with the same unconditional and generous love that you shower on us. We do not share your love as we should, nor do we speak your words of comfort and encouragement as often as we could. We acknowledge your authority when it pleases us but deny it at other times. We hesitate to tell of all that you do for us and seek the acceptance of others rather than sharing your truth boldly and with confidence. For these, and all our faults, forgive us.

Listen and in the silence of a contrite heart we hear God say, “Your sins are forgiven”.

Forgiven, let us begin again, renewed in Jesus. We look to the authority shown to us in Him both in the words He spoke and the work He did, and we are humbled that He should come to live among people as our brother and our example. When He spoke, the crowds listened and the demons obeyed. He did not seek to control with such power but to draw us ever closer to Him and through Him to you Father. Help us to constantly look to Him as our guide and source of life. Let us learn from Him and seek to do your will, following His teaching. Amen. Complete these prayers by saying the Lord’s Prayer using the words you are most comfortable with.

**The reading** appointed for today is from Mark 1:21-28:

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is

this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

### **Thoughts:**

Our son Paul was a retained firefighter for a while. On one occasion the crew were called to a flooded area. Paul’s task was to setup a roadblock with cones. All was well while he stood there beside the cones stopping the traffic and directing drivers but as soon as he moved to help man the pumps the cars began to drive around the cones to try and access a nearby club. Dressed in his fireman’s uniform Paul could speak and act with authority affecting the actions of others. He had a natural authority which the inanimate cones did not.

In the passage from Mark, Jesus spoke and taught with authority. He was starting out in His ministry at this point. He had just been baptised and chosen His disciples. Now it was time for Him to begin His work and show what He stood for. The natural place to do that was in the synagogue. The synagogue was a place for the reading of God’s word and the exposition of it, for teaching and instruction. The fact that Jesus spoke there did not establish His authority, rather it was the way in which He spoke that did that. To the Jews, the Torah, or the law, was sacred and nothing could be added or taken from it. The priests and scribes, when teaching presented it as a set of principles and regulations which could be applied to every aspect of life. In each instance when they spoke, they referred back to the authority of the law, they never made a decision of their own or an independent judgement. Jesus however spoke with personal authority. He offered new insight and understanding into His own tradition. He dared to tell the people what God’s will was and how the kingdom was coming. His listeners were astonished, they had never come across such a way of teaching before. From the moment He first spoke Jesus overturned the expected norm. He did not speak in stilted quotations from scripture, He spoke as if He needed no other authority beyond Himself, He didn’t draw on the words of experts, He spoke from the heart and with God’s authority. He was sure and confident in what He said.

Jesus also acted with authority. When the unclean spirit spoke, Jesus dealt with the interruption in the same calm way in which He had been teaching. “Be quiet” He said and “come out of him.” No drama or great fuss, a few words and it was all over. Jesus, with His simple instruction, which was clear, brief and above all authoritative, exorcised the demon from the man and healed him. This was to become a pattern of His ministry. He would be confronted by many people who were suffering, some like this man for whom life had become a nightmare, as his personality was no longer his own, some who were physically disabled and others who were ill with leprosy or a fever. Jesus dealt with them all with the same gentle but deeply effective authority. The power came from within Jesus and the onlookers were astonished. No one had ever seen anything like it before.

Jesus’ authority affected His listeners. The way He spoke amazed them, but for Him that was not enough, He had to act too and in all that He did He was pointing beyond himself to His Father who through Him was at work in the world.

How does that same authority affect us? Do we let Jesus’ words from scripture amaze us? Do we expect them to speak afresh to us each time we read or hear them? Do they challenge us to act, to bless others as a result? In what direction do our words and actions point, is it beyond ourselves to God who is still at work in the world? What better time can there be to seek to bless others, and so show a hurting world that Christ still walks amongst us? May all we do and say point to Jesus and through Him to our Father.

**Let us pray:** We think of the man possessed by the unclean spirit and pray for those for whom life is a nightmare in so many ways, day and night. We pray for peace for all, both world peace and inner peace. We think of those facing the nightmare of hunger and homelessness in distant countries and here in our towns and cities. In a world where wealth is distributed so unfairly we pray that all may be fed, clothed and housed, whatever their social or economic situation.

We bring before you Father those in the nightmare worlds of loneliness, fear, depression, hopelessness and despair. Meet with them wherever they are and give them comfort and a hope for the future we pray.

Yet others face the daily struggle against pain, illness and loss. We lift them to your throne of grace. Minister to them that pain may ease and they may find rest in your healing love.

We pray for ourselves. May we never cease to be amazed and astonished by all you do for us and all that you teach us. May we never become indifferent to your power and the way you continue to be at work in our world today. Help us to boldly take hold of the authority you give to us as your people and face up to the evils which surround us: discrimination, inequality, bullying, injustice and much more. May our words and actions not be empty but be borne of love for others that we may point the way to Jesus and His saving grace. Let us never dilute the message of your kingdom to the extent that it doesn't shake the listener or provoke a reaction, but help us speak out with conviction taking the truth and showing how it is relevant to all. We ask these and all our prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

We end by reflecting on the words of hymn number 348, "He is Lord, he is Lord;" for until we accept His authority in our lives, we will find no true rest.

Video [here](#)

He is Lord, he is Lord ;  
he is risen from the dead, and he is Lord ;  
every knee shall bow, every tongue confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is King, he is King ;  
he will draw all nations to him, he is King ;  
and the time shall be when the world shall sing  
that Jesus Christ is King.

He is love, he is love ;  
he has shown us by his life that he is love ;  
all his people sing with one voice of joy  
that Jesus Christ is love.

He is life, he is life ;  
he has died to set us free and he is life ;  
and he calls us all to live evermore,  
for Jesus Christ is life.

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**Blessing:** May God's Word be in your heart; may God's Word be on  
your lips.  
May God's Word be in your touch, may God's Word direct your feet.  
On this day and all your days to come, may God's Word be the life you  
live. Amen.

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