

**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year B – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Lesson Plans for Younger Children**

**Scripture: Mark 1:21-28**

**Background**

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

**A Notation for This Week’s Gospel**

Who is this man? He now has a little band of raw recruits – eager to serve yet largely clueless. Does Jesus send them off to school? No. He shows them. He models the behavior that will form disciples. He teaches with authority. He is right where they are – not way over their heads. He heals when he notices it is needed. Who he is speaks powerfully: as one with authority.

**Theme: Who is this Jesus?**

**Before:** You may need paper and crayons. Consider whether you and the children could take a walk within the building – to simulate Jesus and his disciples walking to the synagogue. If that is not realistic, the session can be done in your own space. The activity honors the fact that children learn by noticing and imitating so a pantomime of the story is suggested as the activity. If possible, create a simple “scroll” using two dowels (could even be paper towel cardboard cores) and a few sheets of paper taped together and onto whatever you are using as dowels.

**Beginning:** Tell the children we have a story about Jesus showing his disciples what he wanted them to do. The first thing they did was go to church; and the first thing Jesus did was give a sermon. What would we say a sermon is? (If they are not clear, tell them that a priest, deacon, or lay preacher reads the Bible, thinks about it, prays about it, and then tells us what these words mean.)

**Opening Prayer:** Thank you, God, for wanting us to be your helpers. Amen.

**The Story:** Jesus had some friends to help him. They wanted to know what they should do to help. So, the first thing Jesus did was walk with his friends, walk all the way to their church. (It was called a synagogue.) Jesus got up and read the stories from the Bible. They did not have a book, like we do; the words were written on a scroll. (Show what you have brought.) Jesus explained what all the hard words meant. And his disciples said: “I get it!” There was a man at church who needed help. His body was not working well, so Jesus simply put his hand on the

man's shoulder and healed him. "Wow!" said all the people. "This man is special." And they told all their friends.

**Activity: A Story Without Words**

Ask the children to think out loud with you, at first, so they can "tell" this story with actions – not words. Some questions to get them started:

- Did Jesus drive his friends to church in his car? (No, of course not. They did not have cars, they walked.)
- Did someone read the story from a book? (No, they used a scroll.)
- Who gave the sermon? (Jesus.)
- What did the man need? (He needed to be healed.)
- What did Jesus do? (Jesus put his hand on the man's shoulder and the man got well.)
- If it is possible to walk around the building, tell the children that would be a way to "show" Jesus and his friends walking to church.

**The Story Without Words:** Tell the children you will watch while they show you the story without words. If they get stuck, ask them leading questions such as "What did Jesus do after everyone heard the story?"

**Activity:** Give the children paper and crayons and invite them to draw this story without words that they have just presented.

**Getting Closure:** Tell the children we are going to walk around our room once or twice, pretending we are walking with Jesus to go to church with Jesus. Then we can stop and sit in a circle for a minute.

**Closing Prayer.** Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to show us what we need to do. Amen.

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**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year B – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Lesson Plans for Older Children**

**Scripture: Mark 1:21-28**

**Background**

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

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Who is this man? He now has a little band of raw recruits – eager to serve yet largely clueless. Does Jesus send them off to school? No. He shows them. He models the behavior that will form disciples. He teaches with authority. He is right where they are – not way over their heads. He heals when he notices it is needed. Who he is speaks powerfully: as one with authority.

**Theme: Who is this Jesus?**

**Before Class:** You will need copies of the script below for the children, and you will also need strips of paper (a sheet of regular copy paper cut in strips about 2 inches high), and pencils.

**Beginning:**

As the children gather, ask them how their week was. Ask what they learned this week.

Once everyone is there, ask them to help you brainstorm the different ways in which we learn and write them up on a sheet of easel paper or white board. (We learn by following an example, watching someone else, reading or following instructions and rules, through our experiences, seeing something, reading, etc.) Keep this in mind as we enter into the story.

**Opening Prayer:** Help us, God, to figure out what you call us to do. Amen.

**Option:** Before you read the passage, you may choose to tell the group that in this passage there is a man with “an unclean spirit” and discuss what they think this means. You can tell them that at that time people had no concept of viruses or even germs, of mental illness, nor of many diseases now recognized, such as Hodgkin’s disease, cerebral palsy, etc. If a person was incapacitated, people assumed the person had an “unclean spirit.”

**The Story: Mark 1: 21 – 28** You will need volunteers to read the parts: Narrator, the man possessed by an “unclean spirit”, Jesus, all the rest of the class. (see script below)

## **Reflection Questions:**

### **Verses 21 – 22**

- What is a synagogue and why did Jesus and his disciples go there? (The synagogue was the temple where Jewish people worshipped. Jesus and his disciples were Jews.)
- What kind of teaching did people expect from the “scribes”? Scribes are those who had spent huge amounts of time studying the scriptures to be sure they understood all the laws. (Do’s and Don’ts.)
- What do we think it means that Jesus “taught them as one having authority”? (He taught from God, and only God. He obviously understood a bigger picture and he was able to explain it in ways to help them “get it.”)

### **Verses 23 – 28**

- How does Mark describe what was wrong with the man in verse 23? (The man had an “unclean spirit.”)
- What do we think might have been wrong with the man? (Accept whatever the children come up with. See the “option” note above about how you may want to explain/discuss this.)
- What did Jesus do? (He silenced him and sent the unclean spirit away.)

**Discussion and Activity:** Ask the children if this sounds familiar: You are starting on your homework and all of a sudden you think: “I can’t do this – it is just too hard.” Ask them what other kinds of ‘not good’ thoughts cause us to lose confidence in our abilities.

Give each child a strip of paper and invite them to write some of these messages that they receive (or that they tell themselves). Let them know that no one will read these messages. After a few minutes, invite them to fold them up and place them in a large bowl near the teacher.

Read verse 25 again. Ask the children to come up with their own words to describe what Jesus would want us to do about negative thoughts. What might we say? (Something like: “Jesus wants you outta here!”)

Take the strips of paper that they just placed into the bowl and begin ripping them up using the words that are in the scripture or the words that the children came up with reminding them that God is taking these thoughts away from them. Jesus takes these words and these feelings from us, wanting us to be whole.

Then, invite the children to take a different strip of paper and cover it with a statement or many statements of positive thoughts – in their own words – to take home with them. They can decorate the strip if they want. Make one for yourself.

**Getting Closure:** Ask the children ways they can remember that Jesus wants us to be well, both in our bodies and in our thoughts. Suggest that they take these strips of paper with positive thoughts and tuck them into a book or put them in their wallets.

**Closing Prayer.** Thank you, God, for helping us to stop putting ourselves down. Amen.

## **Mark 1:21-28**

Narrator: They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out,

Person with an Unclean Spirit: ‘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.’

Narrator: But Jesus rebuked him, saying,

Jesus: ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’

Narrator: And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another,

All: ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’

Narrator: At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year B – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Lesson Plans for Adults**

**Scripture: Mark 1:21-28**

**Background**

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

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**Theme: Who is this Jesus?**

**Supplies and Preparation:** You will need copies of the narrative Gospel reading and definition sheet below. You will need either a white board or easel and paper.

**Beginning:**

Brainstorm with the group by asking: What do you think of when I say the word authority? (Write their responses on a white board or easel.)

Let’s read through the definitions of authority. (The definitions are printed at the bottom of the Gospel narrative so everyone can read them. You could have them read it silently, however it will be more engaging if you go around the room and invite people to each read one of the definitions out loud.)

**Source or reference**

**1a** (1) : a citation (as from a book or file) used in defense or support (2) : the source from which the citation is drawn

**b** (1) : a conclusive statement or set of statements (as an official decision of a court) (2) : a decision taken as a precedent (3) testimony

**c** : an individual cited or appealed to as an expert

**Power**

**2a** : power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior

**b** : freedom granted by one in authority

### **To administer or command**

**3 a :** persons in command; *specifically* government

**b :** a governmental agency or corporation to administer a revenue-producing public enterprise <the transit *authority*>

Once everyone is done reading the definition, ask if there is one definition that sticks out for them when they think of Jesus' ministry.

**Opening Prayer:** Thank you, God, for the teaching with authority that we have from Jesus. Amen.

**The Scripture (Mark 1: 21-28):** You will need volunteers to read the parts of the narrative Gospel. Notice that everyone has a line to read together as well.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- What is the setting for this passage? (Jesus has just called the first four of his disciples, and he has brought them to Capernaum. It is the Sabbath and time to head to the synagogue.)
- Why do we suppose the authorities at the synagogue deferred to Jesus' choosing to teach? (We do not know. Perhaps they had heard of him and wanted to hear what he had to say, perhaps there was just something about him that made them feel they should invite him to preach. Perhaps he simply stood up and began to preach.)
- What was the response of those who heard Jesus speak? (He "taught as one having authority.")
- What else might those who heard have said about his teaching? (Perhaps they said things like, "This had the ring of truth to it," or, "I could understand every word he said!")
- What may have been the response of the scribes? (Jealousy? Disgruntlement – Hey, we study like mad to give good sermons and we don't get any respect. Fear? – Who IS this guy and will he take our jobs?)
- What do we think people understood as an "unclean spirit" and what do we make of it? (An "unclean spirit" would have been the explanation for a disease they could not otherwise diagnose.)
- How would we explain Jesus' response to the "unclean spirit"? (Jesus did not come to save the people from Rome, but to show them that the Kingdom of God is right here, now. Jesus healed people as yet another manifestation that the Kingdom was present.)
- What was the response of the people who witnessed this event? (They couldn't be stopped from spreading the story far and wide.)
- Now that we have read this story, let's go back to our definitions of authority. What kind of authority do you think Jesus had?
- If we use definition 1c: an individual cited or appealed to as an expert, how was Jesus looked to as an authority in a positive light?
- What can we learn from an individual who can, because of their expertise, help us see things in a new light?
- If Jesus is our source, our expert with a new teaching, how does this kind of authority inform our lives? What new teaching does it bring forth?

**Option:** Invite the group to consider, privately, what “unclean spirits” might be pestering us – voices that hold us back, make us feel incompetent, etc. Invite the group to consider, privately, whether they can choose to say “Be silent, and come out!” or whether we need to share our thoughts with the clergy, a trusted friend, or possibly professionals.

**Getting Closure:** Consider, together, these statements:

- Jesus came to show us that each of us is welcome in the Kingdom of God that is right here, now.
- Jesus calls out of us what impedes our growth as well as bringing us a new teaching that invites us to explore us who we are called to be.

**Closing Prayer:** Thank you, God, for the authority we see in Jesus. Amen.



## Mark 1:21-28

Narrator: They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out,

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### Definitions of Authority

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