

[Mark 1:21-28]

It must be difficult for parents to teach their children to trust people, which is a beautiful thing to do, while also warning them to be cautious of people who might deceive them. There have always been liars: cheating shop-keepers; shonky advertisers and the horror of child molesters, to name just a few. The challenge to sort truth from lies *seems* more overwhelming now, since what was a flood of mass media has been turned into a tsunami by the internet.

How can we tell the true from the false? Can we trust our elected leaders? What is *authentic* teaching? Today we read Mark's version of how Jesus began his work, teaching in synagogues on the sabbath. Those who heard Jesus were deeply impressed, because he taught *with authority*. What does this mean? Was it Jesus' personality? Did he explain the scriptures better than the scribes and pharisees? Was it because he backed up his teaching with powerful actions?

Inauthentic words and actions are all around us. It is a relief that a president of the USA who told many blatant lies has been replaced, but don't be deceived! That nation, the 'guardian of democracy', since World War II has overthrown lawful governments in more than 50 other nations, by financing insurgents or waging destructive wars. * Most other governments are equally dishonest, but don't have the power to do so much damage.

We Australians cherish 'a fair go', but for years our governments tried to cheat the impoverished nation of East Timor out of oil and gas worth billions of dollars. Not much truth there!

But doesn't each of us have to struggle with *our own* untruths: the things we find difficult to admit even to ourselves? How hard it is to face up to domestic violence in our family; or addictions. Or young people's big mistakes? How often do we admit there is clericalism in our church; or try to change it?

Mark's gospel often mentions Jesus teaching, but all he says about its *content* is: '*the reign of God has begun*'; and that Jesus challenges us to *repent*, to change our mind and heart. Jesus confronted the evils of his day: healing people imprisoned by physical, mental or spiritual disorders. Even before he began teaching, he struggled with evil out in the desert.

In this synagogue, Jesus *loudly* commanded the evil to leave the possessed man; just as on another occasion he *loudly* commanded a storm to cease. Then the man *gave a loud cry* as he was healed.

Mark reminds us that when Jesus came to die on the cross, he too *gave a loud cry*; his final victory over the world's evil. No wonder the crowds were amazed.

Jesus doesn't yet want this synagogue crowd to know who he is, but as we listen to the story, we know that Jesus is the son of God. We heard the Father's voice at his baptism; we heard Satan in the desert call him Son of God; we already know about his resurrection.

He *is* the Son of God. So here's a question: are *we* trying to bring about God's Rule on earth? To do this, are we prepared to repent, to 'change our minds'? Perhaps we need to *let go* of a mistaken view of God that earlier teachers gave us: a God who is demanding; punishing; who rejects a large part of the human race? Do we accept Jesus' authentic teaching that God is infinite love: a good shepherd, who rejects no member of his flock? A loving father, who forgives and welcomes back the most sinful child?

Do we let ourselves be amazed by what God does *in us*? Do we know that the Risen Christ is present here, in our shared eucharist, and in our hearts all the time? Do we believe that Jesus has already *overcome all the untruths* in the world, and in my life too? Will we do our bit to bring truth in our part of the world, through our love and prayer?

The struggle against evil is not other people's responsibility, but ours, every day. It is the struggle to *choose* love and not *refuse* love; to forgive every person, and not reject those persons who have hurt us most.

As we become more aware of God *in us*, the Reign of God will come, *around us*. The victory is certain, for Christ speaks with the *authority of God*.

* *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*. [William Blum, 2004]