

# With Authority



Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:14-21,31-37

Year B Epiphany 4 ; Year C Epiphany 3

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part    ▲ = medium sized part    ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲	▲	■		
▲	<b>Matthew</b> - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	▲			▲	
▲	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲			▲	
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲	▲	▲		
▲	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		■			
▲	<b>Synagogue Leader</b> - an earnest, thoughtful leader of his community struggling with a difficult problem			▲	▲	●
▲	<b>Possessed Man</b> - a man possessed by an evil spirit				▲	▲
●	<b>Priest</b> - a priest of the synagogue				▲	●
●	<b>Jesus</b>					▲

## Scene 1

James , John , Matthew , Peter

**James**        Okay, I think we need to talk to the rabbi before he preaches today. We don't want a repeat of Nazareth.

**Matthew**    Why not? The sermon at Nazareth was seminal, historic.

**James**        And it got us kicked out of the city - and him almost killed!

**Peter** We should have fought back, that's all!

**James** *[dismissively]* That's your solution for everything.

**Peter** Isn't that what we're doing? We're going to throw off the yoke of the Romans, aren't we? It's not going to happen without a fight. Of course, if you don't have the stomach for it...

**James** *[angrily]* Hey! I'm as ready for a fight as anybody! You brag and brag, but -

**John** *[interrupting]* Please! James, Peter, the fight is not with each other. And it's not against our own people, either. These were Israelis, and that was the rabbi's home town.

**Peter** They sure had a funny way of showing it.

**Matthew** It was the power of his words:  
"The Spirit of God is on me,  
Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
And recovery of sight for the blind,  
To set the oppressed free,  
And to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."  
The forces of darkness naturally rose up to oppose them.

**John** But to me, they aren't "fighting words" at all! That's what amazed me. I thought he was going to preach against the Occupation, or against the corruption of the nation, but it turned out to be something completely different, good news from another world entirely.

**James** What "other world"? It was totally about the Romans. We're the poor oppressed people who are getting the good news. We're the prisoners.

**Peter** What about the blind?

**James** That's them, the Romans. Soon, they're going to see what they're up against!

**John** Maybe. In any case, the vision was remarkable. And he spoke so authoritatively. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

**Peter** Fulfilled? What scripture?

**Matthew** It's from the prophet Isaiah, from a portion of his writings that seems to consist of random unclaimed prophecies.

**John** *[in wonder]* He claimed it. For himself.

**Peter** But, I don't get it. It's not fulfilled yet. There are still plenty of blind people around, as far as I know, and plenty of prisoners.

**James** But the man who's going to change all that has arrived on the scene!

**Matthew** Amen!

## Scene 2

James , John , Judas

*{The next day at the synagogue.}*

**Judas** Excuse me, are you followers of the rabbi who's speaking today?

**John** Yes, we are. I'm John, and this is my brother James.

**Judas** John is *my* rabbi's name.

**James** So you're a member of this synagogue?

**Judas** No, no. My rabbi's an itinerate preacher, just like yours. He's out at the river as we speak, baptizing.

**John** I've heard of him! So you're one of his followers.

**Judas** His majordomo, really. I handle all the organizing.

**James** *[heartily]* I suppose you've come to check out the competition.

**Judas** Or: to meet a potential ally.

**John** Nothing would please me more than to have allies in this work. You'll have to talk to the rabbi, of course.

**Judas** Directly? You mean he does all his own organizing?

**James** Of course!

**Judas** He decides where you go and who you partner with and everything?

**John** Pretty much. Is that not how it usually works?

**Judas** True visionaries often aren't so good with the day to day practicalities. That's why it's best to have some kind of leadership structure within the group.

**James** *[indignantly]* Our rabbi is doing just fine making the decisions.

**John** Actually, James, you weren't so sure about that yesterday.

**James** Oh. Yeah.

**John** *[to Judas]* Yesterday, the rabbi was almost killed by a mob in his own home town.

**Judas** Yes, I heard about that. It's why I decided to come hear him speak today. Did he really cite a prophecy about the coming of a utopian future for the nation and then claim he was the fulfillment?

**John** He did.

**Judas** And then turned around and said some harsh and provocative things that angered the crowd that he should have had in the palm of his hand?

**James** That's exactly what I was saying! Why couldn't he have stayed with the good news and rallied the crowd to join us?

**John** If you heard all this, why are you still interested in the rabbi?

**Judas** Because that's the very mark of a true prophet. The one I serve is the same. These guys are not like us. They don't think like us and they don't make decisions the way we do. They're forces of nature, like a storm or an earthquake. That's why it's important to have separate leadership: to try and keep at least some control over the whirlwind, to direct it in constructive rather than destructive directions.

### Scene 3

James , John , Synagogue Leader

**James** What did you think about what that guy said?

**John** It's amazing how, even second hand and from miles away, the rabbi made an impression on him.

**James** I meant what he said about leadership.

**John** Oh. I don't know. It was interesting.

**James** I think it was absolutely on the money. I think we should follow his advice.

**John** I guess we could discuss it with the group tonight.

**James** No! If we bring it up to the whole group, everybody's going to want to be the lead organizer. Especially Peter. It'll be a mess.

**John** Then how do we talk about it?

**James** We don't. We just do it. We just become it, you and me.

**John** What are you talking about?

**James** We just start taking on the role. We just start calling the shots. Like it's always been us.

**John** Why us? Why *not* Peter, or anybody else?

**James** We were first! We got in before anybody else. And we're the most qualified. Peter's just a poor fisherman. We ran a fleet! And the rabbi already seems to favor you.

**John** I don't know...

**Synagogue Leader** Excuse me, but I need to speak to your master.

**James** [*decisively*] You can talk to us. We're in charge.

**John** James!

**Synagogue Leader** Sorry to trouble you with this, but there's going to be a complication with your rabbi's sermon today. There's a member of the synagogue, an unfortunate man, who's, well, very ill. I mean, in the head. He acts out. Disrupts our services. Some say he's possessed by an evil spirit. Anyway, he shows up sometimes, and sometimes when he does, he causes

disturbances. And I wanted to warn you: he's here today, and very...active.

**James**

Well that won't do! You understand our rabbi is in great demand, don't you? We can't have some lunatic ruining his appearance. Surely you have the authority to bar him from your synagogue, at least for today.

**Synagogue Leader**

We've chosen not to take that tack with him. We consider him a member of the community, and everyone's been willing to tolerate his outbursts.

**John**

Have you tried getting him some help? Whatever his problem is, there must be some help available. If he's mentally ill, maybe he can be treated by a doctor, or given counseling to help him deal with his illness. If he's possessed...well, there are solutions there, too, aren't there?

**Synagogue Leader**

The doctors have done their best, and I and other teachers here have spent many hours trying to connect with him. We've considered attempting an exorcism, but it carries such a big risk: if the man is not in fact possessed, an exorcism could damage him even further.

**James**

This is ridiculous! If you ask me, this is what you should do: go ahead and try the exorcism because: what have you got to lose? You've tried everything else! Then if it doesn't work: kick him out! And maybe *that* will finally "cure" him. Maybe he's just a jerk who needs to have limits set for him. Maybe once you show him you're the boss, he'll fall in line.

**Synagogue Leader**

*[carefully neutral]* It's a complicated situation. We frankly feel a little paralyzed over it. But we firmly believe that God is in this struggle, and that we will come to His truth if we remain faithfully engaged with it.

#### Scene 4

Matthew , Peter , Possessed Man , Priest , Synagogue Leader

**Possessed Man**

*[raving]* "Physician, heal yourself," you will say! "Heal yourself!" "Do here what you did in Capernaum!" Ha!

**Peter**

*[angrily]* What the...?

<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	I'm sorry. I warned your lead organizers about this.
<b>Peter</b>	My what?
<b>Possessed Man</b>	<i>[raving]</i> There were many widows, do you hear me? Many widows when the sky was shut. Three and a half years the sky was shut! Three and a half years!
<b>Matthew</b>	<i>[more thoughtfully and with some awe]</i> What the...?
<b>Peter</b>	<i>[to Matthew]</i> Can you believe it? On the day the rabbi is supposed to speak, they let this nut job in!
<b>Matthew</b>	<i>[urgently]</i> That's no nut job!
<b>Priest</b>	That's what I keep saying! The man is clearly possessed by an evil spirit. <i>[to the Synagogue Leader]</i> Why won't you let us attempt an exorcism?
<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	Because the real problem is far from clear. If we started treating this as a supernatural issue and it turned out not to be -
<b>Possessed Man</b>	<i>[raving]</i> And where did he go? Where do you think the prophet went? One widow! One pagan widow!
<b>Matthew</b>	That's no evil spirit. That's the spirit of God!
<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	What? What makes you say that?
<b>Matthew</b>	Peter! Can't you hear what he's saying? Don't you remember where you heard those words before?
<b>Peter</b>	Words schmerds! This guy just needs to have some sense knocked into him. Hey! You!
	<i>{Peter tries to grab the man, but is flung to the side.}</i>
<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	No! Don't!
<b>Matthew</b>	Peter!

<b>Priest</b>	Still think it's not an evil spirit?
<b>Peter</b>	<i>[coming to]</i> Wow. He's...he's strong. <i>[to the priest]</i> Hey, maybe you're right. Can you really drive the spirit out?
<b>Priest</b>	I - I hope so. We have the authority. We've been promised the power.
<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	You mean you've never done this before?
<b>Priest</b>	Well...
<b>Matthew</b>	And where are you promised the power, anyway? What scripture?
<b>Priest</b>	Well...
<b>Possessed Man</b>	<i>[raving]</i> And Namaan. The Syrian! Of all the lepers, who was healed? To whom did he go?
<b>Peter</b>	<i>[decisively]</i> Okay, it's up to us. He's strong, but he's no Samson. Two of us could take him. Three for sure. Who's with me?
	<i>{Everybody begins talking at once until they're interrupted by Jesus. Note: Jesus should make sure to interrupt them before any of them are done with their lines.}</i>
<b>Synagogue Leader</b>	<i>[simultaneously with the others]</i> No, you mustn't! We don't know! You'll hurt him! We mustn't make things worse!
<b>Matthew</b>	<i>[simultaneously with the others]</i> I'm telling you, he's a prophet of God! Can't you hear what he's saying? Don't you remember?
<b>Priest</b>	<i>[simultaneously with the others]</i> We <i>have</i> to have the authority! Who else would? It only stands to reason!
<b>Possessed Man</b>	<i>[simultaneously with the others]</i> Ha! He passed through the lot of you! Not a one of you could hold him! Not a one!

## Scene 5

Jesus , Possessed Man , Priest , Synagogue Leader



*{Jesus enters and silences everybody with one loud command.}*

**Jesus** Silence!

**Possessed Man** *[in a loud, tormented voice, after a pause]* What do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! The Holy One of God!

**Jesus** *[in a quieter, but equally firm voice]* Silence. Come out of him!

*{The Possessed Man shrieks in pain and then falls silent.}*

**Synagogue Leader** *[rushing to the man's side]* Are you all right?

**Possessed Man** *[weakly, in wonder and surprise]* I am. I'm all right. Rabbi?

**Synagogue Leader** *[joyfully]* Yes, it's me!

**Priest** But...he's not a priest. He's an itinerate preacher from Nazareth. How did he do that? *[with sudden resolve]* It's a hoax!

**Synagogue Leader** Come on! This poor fellow's been with us for years now, and look at him. He's cured!

**Possessed Man** *[to the priest]* Father? Did you cure me? If so, I thank you with all my heart.

**Priest** *[interrupting him reluctantly]* No, my son, it wasn't me. It was...God.

**Jesus** *[to the crowd, in his sermonizing voice]*  
A reading from the prophet Isaiah:  
The Spirit of God is on me,  
Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
And recovery of sight for the blind,  
To set the oppressed free,  
And to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord!

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