

**W@W041**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:7 & 18-19** *Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 18-19 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. (NIV)*

Choking is not pleasant, but worse, it can be fatal. As God's Word springs up taking root in our heart, worries can easily put a stranglehold around our relationship with Jesus. Often, Satan does not have to intervene personally - there is quite enough in our confused and hectic lifestyle to put us off our spiritual stroke. We hear the Word and may relish it; we agree with what God says ... and then our minds and hearts get swamped by worries, and Jesus seems far away.

Jesus categorises these troubles into unresolved lifestyle issues, concern over money, and frustrated ambitions. Everybody has at least one of these to contend with, most have all three! Have you noticed how easily relationships or issues at home can erode your concentration at work (and vice versa)? The same is true of working with Christ and letting Him work on us. But there is no way we can live in a spiritually sealed world. The key question is whether we will allow the world and flesh to choke the life of Jesus ... or allow the life of Jesus to order our chaotic private and work lives.

The answer is tested by the degree to which the Word of God bears fruit in us. When we see the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) shaping the way we conduct our business and interactions with others; when we find ourselves glad to share about Jesus and when others are strengthened in Christ because of us - then we know that we are being fruitful. When that is not true, the world and our fleshly nature has colluded to take control away from Jesus and the choking has started. In that case, gardening is well overdue!

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, help me to give priority to clearing the ground so that I have time to read Your Word, meditate and pray. Forgive me when I allow worry to push You out. Help me to talk to You about the worries so that You can produce order out of chaos. And help me to be aware of choking believers and give me the wisdom to know how to help them in Your love. For Christ's Sake, Amen.*

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**W@W042**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:8 & 20** *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop - thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." (NIV)*

It's marvellous when everything works out just right: when the key fits the lock and the answer meets the question. The seed of God's Word is always good and has huge potential, but it needs a receptive heart in which to grow. It will be a heart which allows for deep growth, where over-busyness is disciplined out and where every worry is submitted to the divine scrutiny committee.

When God's Word meets a heart that is hungry for truth and prepared to give Jesus the time and space to take ownership of the life, big things can happen. Thirty, sixty or a hundred per cent profit would be considered good in any business (especially in these days of squeezed margins), but God has designed His seed for ultimate productivity! Jesus, speaking about Himself, said that if a seed 'dies' it will produce much fruit - His one death has produced life for an infinite number who will trust in Him.

There is no limit to what God will do through your life when His Word takes root and is cherished above all else. So why do we have such small expectations? The problem is that we look at ourselves as a load of dirt, instead of seeing God's Word as the life-giving seed. The reality is that we are a load of dirt - and that is just the place where God's Word is designed to take root! The change is as great as from ploughed furrows to acres of golden corn. Never underestimate the transforming power of God's Word.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You that You have designed Your precious Word to take root in the soil of my life. Help me to cherish what You are doing in me and never to underestimate Your power to change me, and others through me. For Christ's sake, Amen.*

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**W@W043**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:9 & 13** *Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? (NIV)*

Deafness can be a big problem. It gets in the way of relationship, confuses business and prevents critical warnings that could save our lives. Spiritually, the same is true. In an age of multiple TV and internet channels, we all have to choose where we will tune in. Jesus knew that His hearers weren't on the right wavelength and even the disciples didn't get it.

Information, by itself, provides no answer or solution - indeed the plethora of internet data and multiple business emails often just cause confusion. If we are to understand a proposal or analyse an account, we need to focus on it exclusively. Even then we may need assistance. In spiritual matters, we always need help! No matter how novice or experienced a Christian, we cannot know the mind of God unless God Himself explains what He means.

That was the task of Jesus to His trainee apostles. Today, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives - to explain the mind of Christ, so that we can serve Him productively. Do not be surprised if family, friends and colleagues cannot understand what is patently obvious to you: they too need the Spirit of God to speak to them, explaining what Jesus is saying. And it is a good prayer to ask God that He will do just that.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank You for the way in which You have explained to me who You are and what I should do. Please continue! May I never be so arrogant as to think I can know Your mind apart from Your Holy Spirit's help. Please work in my friends and family so that they too will understand what Your Word means. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**W@W044**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:10-12** *When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, " 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!' " (NIV)*

Some questions we do not ask, publicly, for fear of being thought stupid. Some answers need extra explanation and time to digest. And the disciples needed all the help they could get! But they started at the right place - they came to Jesus, away from the crowd, and asked him what the parables meant. It is always reassuring to know that you are taken seriously, and even more so when you find that you are entrusted with an answer that is bigger than you thought.

Jesus still treats serious enquirers in the same way. But it needs the 'secret place' of being alone with Him before the 'secret answer' is revealed. The parables were public appetite whetters: those who were hungry to know the truth asked Jesus. Of course, the 'secret of the kingdom' had been hidden until Jesus came - because He IS the secret treasure of God. Mercifully, Jesus did not come to tout religion but to reveal himself as the 'secret key' to the home of God.

What a privilege to be entrusted with that secret! What a responsibility too! In Christ, you have been given the same key to the heaven that the disciples had - the knowledge of who Jesus is and what He came to do for everybody. The prophetic task is the same that was given to Isaiah (Is 6:8-10), to announce the Kingdom in the full knowledge that many will want to stay on the outside. Discouraging prospect? Don't forget that the disciples were being taught that the seed has to be scattered everywhere; they had to learn that the right soil may be found in some of the unlikely places. So let's keep speaking of Jesus, feeding truth to the hungry and not being put off by those who don't get it.

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father. Thank You for entrusting me with the key to Your kingdom - the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Keep me so confident in Your Word that I will keep on sowing wherever I can. Help me not to give up when friends and colleagues do not appear hungry for You, because I believe Your Word is still as powerful as ever to those who welcome what You say. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W045**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:21-23** *He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." (NIV)*

It is plainly ridiculous to waste the light of an oil lamp by putting it under anything opaque. That would defeat the object or purpose of having the lamp. Likewise, obscuring the truth about Jesus is the complete opposite of what He intended. Jesus and His gospel was God's secret (Mark 4:11) - hidden until the first Pentecost but now not for hiding any more! God's way to heaven is to be broadcast, like the seed. Why do you think that you have been let into the secret? Is it just to be saved and personally related with the God who made you? Yes ... but more than that. You have been given the secret to share with others.

So why do we creep around with the Gospel truth locked behind pursed lips? Why are we so 'careful' that we don't 'put them off'? The truth is that they are already 'off' and will remain 'off' until the Gospel message is spoken to them and the light of Christ switches them 'on' by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Some may say that unwillingness to share the Word is shyness or fear, but if it is so obviously meant to be seen openly, is it not disobedience ... or worse - collusion with the enemy? It is Satan who obscures, but Jesus brings everything to the light. Occult simply means 'hidden'. If we hide what is meant to be seen openly, are we unwittingly conspiring with Satan and his occult schemes?

Jesus is training His disciples to understand the priorities of His Kingdom, so that they would be His witnesses when filled with the Holy Spirit (and that was a life or death choice for them). What about us? We will not usually have our lives threatened - so let's make 'sharing Jesus' a daily priority. Ears to hear?

**Prayer:** *Dear Father God. I know that it was so important for you to send Jesus to be our way to heaven, and so important to send your Holy Spirit so that we can be Christ's witnesses. Please convict me of my personal responsibility to share about Jesus with my friends and colleagues - knowing that you are always here to help me. In Jesus' Name. Amen*

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**W@W046**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:24-25** *"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (NIV)*

Often, the value of what we have is not realised until it is taken away; our health, job, a close relationship. We assume that they will be with us for the foreseeable future. So it should not surprise us that bereavement (of whatever kind) brings the guilt of wasted opportunity. Redundancy is no holiday, and even prolonged illness makes us want to get back to work. It would do us no harm to consider the value of our spouse, children, health and home - the very discipline of that appreciation could start to transform our relationships and lifestyle.

But here, Jesus is referring to matters of even greater value. He told His disciples, 'consider what you hear' ... because it is to be used for an excellent purpose. To share about Jesus is to shine pure light onto a dark world. The seed-corn of God's Word is life for today and the generations to come. But suppose you don't use it as instructed ... it will be taken away! In fact, the passage is quite stark. The more you use the Word of God, the more you will be given, to understand and share: the less you use what God tells you, the less you will be able to!

Physically, injuries to limbs and joints need a lot of exercise - often assisted by painful physiotherapy. It is the only way to regain function. Perhaps an office Christian Fellowship, College CU or a regular meeting with prayer partners should have that essential element of challenge, as well as comfort. Without challenging each other to use what God has given us, we may become spiritually unusable in His Kingdom. So, why not take five minutes today - make a list of some of the important things God has given to you and, in the next column, consider how you are using them. Having worked through that, share the idea with another Christian and maybe meet to pray and spur one another on to 'use it or lose it'.

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your many gifts to me particularly the precious knowledge of Jesus. Help me not to just assume Him to be there for my comfort, but to use His power and His Word so that Your Kingdom may be known in my work place and home. For Christ's sake, Amen.*

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**W@W047**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:26-27** *He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (NIV)*

Without sleep, we could not continue to function. But for many in our busy-ness it seems a waste of time. However, all sorts of things happen in our sleep. Our bodies are able to recharge their batteries, the engines slow down to tick over and we have a break from the constant task of thinking. Parents find sleep very useful - not just for their children but themselves! When a toddler is asleep, Mum and Dad can get things done which would be quite impossible otherwise.

Surprisingly, for workaholics (even spiritual ones), there are times when God does not need our help. That is not to say that we should be lazy. However, once we have sown the Word of God, the growth largely depends on the life-power of the seed and the receptivity of the soil. The fact is that God is at work in His Word in people's lives and hearts - and we have not got a clue what is going on. Digging up the seedling periodically is more than likely to be counter-productive. So the true servant of God will be both active and passive (at the right times).

The gospel work requires the faith to trust God to do His work once the seed has been sown. We should have experienced it ourselves. As we look back, we see that God has been at work within us to give us the desire to do what is right and then the ability to change (Phil. 2:13). If God has worked like that in our lives should we not trust Him to do the same in others? I am not advocating gospel apathy or inertia (the seed has to be sown and weeding/feeding must be done), but this is a healthy reminder to consider when our job is done and to let God do His.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, I am amazed at the way You work. Most of the time, I cannot see how You do it. Help me to trust You to grow Your truth within me as I read Your Word, and help me to trust that You will do the same thing in other people. May I never be so anxious thinking about my part, that I forget the wonderful work that You do even when I am asleep. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**W@W048**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:28-29** *All by itself the soil produces corn - first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come. (NIV)*

The Mastermind catch phrase "I've started, so I'll finish" is an apt description of the way in which God works through His Word in our lives. When Jesus says that the corn grows "all by itself", He means that the farmer cannot add anything to the growing process because the life is in the seed.

Most of us are disappointed by the rate of our spiritual progress; and when we think we are doing brilliantly, we might be slipping backwards! But as we submit ourselves to the Word of God, bit by bit we find that the life of God is growing in us. Although conversion may be a point of crisis which we can look back to, a lot of the staging posts on the journey are unremarkable. Nevertheless, growth occurs. Often, we may not notice until someone points out how much we have changed. Occasionally we may have one of those 'reality' moments when it hits us how much God has changed us, say, compared with last year.

When God grows His life within us, He is not just looking for us to have more knowledge of Him and better habits - He is also looking for us to be able to shed more seed into what may seem like a barren landscape. The final harvest will come when Jesus returns and all those who belong to Him will be gathered as His very own. All the others will find their destiny described in Matthew 13:38b-40. A sobering thought, when one thinks about nice respectable colleagues and pleasant friends but all outside of Christ. That is why we need to sow God's truth into their lives.

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, thank You for working in my life even when I do not realise it. Much of my spiritual progress has little to do with me and I am so grateful for Your patience and indwelling power. Help me to scatter the seed of Your Word, so that You can work in the lives of those I work and live with. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**W@W049**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:30-32** *Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." (NIV)*

Jesus selected familiar scenes to describe eternal truth. It should not surprise us that God's creation will remind the observant of their Creator. It is a good starting point for many gospel conversations.

In this story, Jesus chooses to highlight the mustard seed (very small and apparently insignificant), but having the potential to grow massively. It can even provide shelter for the same birds that would have cheerfully eaten the seed (Mark 4:4 describes birds pecking seed from the hard path). Those birds had no idea what they were eating, or how short term was their view of the seed. What a difference when the seed was allowed to grow where it was planted!

The Word of God has a quite disproportionate effect when 'planted' in a receptive heart. It unfolds the massive Kingdom of God as a place of safety ... even for those who, like birds eating the seed, would previously have used it for short term gain. I think of unbelievers seeking churches for their weddings and funerals, or taking the minister's time to sign passport applications or school references. Little do they know the huge change that would come if they received the gospel instead of using the church. But you, reading this email, probably do know. That is why you have been given the privilege of holding the seed in your hands! So plant the seed, and let it grow, and grow and grow.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank you for making it possible for people to shelter in Your Kingdom, as Your Word grows and flourishes. Help me to see that those who, by nature, would use and abuse your truth, are the very people in whom Your truth is designed to take root and transform. Give me the wisdom to announce your Kingdom, and to be bold in doing so, as Jesus was. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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**W@W050**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:33-34** *With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (NIV)*

Illustrations help us learn. Without prior experience, we can only understand something by reference to something we know. The parables provided that link - between the rural economy of His hearers, and the Kingdom, which was home to Jesus. Each parable usually only paints a small part of the picture - but sufficient for people to have their desire for God stirred. And Jesus did not make it complicated. Nor was he ever accused of being boring. He was the ultimate teacher because, with the mind of God, he knew the most important factor for effective communication: it's not what you say, but what they hear that counts.

When God talks to people, He talks personally. Although the seed is broadcast, the Lord knows where each word goes; each has a specific target. He does not lecture us three grades higher than our capacity, but feeds His Word to us, as much as we can understand. Of course, Jesus intended that the disciples would learn more: so he picked up on the parable stories in private, and explained their meaning to his trainee apostles.

In almost three years, the disciples were taught the 'secrets of the kingdom' (as much as they could understand), and the Lord sometimes properly chided their refusal to apply what they had heard. Their privilege, like ours, was to spend time alone with Him - time to reflect and ask questions, time to get to the root of God's answers. Private time with Jesus is the commodity most likely to be squeezed in our busy lives - but without it, our understanding of the most important business ever will be defective ... and so will we.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, Thank you for your amazing knowledge of how much I can understand. Please give me a greater appetite to understand your Word and to spend time alone with You. Help me to recognise those who are spiritually hungry, and fed them appropriately, and encourage them to speak with you privately. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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**W@W051**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:35-38** *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (NIV)*

After the 'classroom' teaching, here is the practical lesson for the disciples! At the end of a busy day, the crowd had been dismissed, and the disciples were ordered to set sail for the other side of the lake. They were tired and even Jesus fell asleep - no hotel room, just an open boat. Despite their skilled seamanship, and the presence of the greatest authority they had ever seen, the disciples felt all alone as the squall hit the little flotilla. As the waves repeatedly doused their boat, threatening to sink it, the disciples showed that they had learned nothing in the school of faith. They had seen that Jesus had power over nature (as well as over people and demons); but they just did not believe, that to be with Jesus was to be safe. They understood the theory well enough, but learning was only complete after they had put it into practice.

Their accusation that 'Jesus did not care'; reflected both fear and unbelief. In fact, those two internal time-bombs, fear and unbelief, always go off together. If they had believed, they would not have been afraid - so fear is a marker of unbelief. Jesus may have been asleep, but he was not ignorant of the weather forecast when he instructed them to sail away from land. He knew what would happen: yet he was personally so secure that he could sleep right through the storm and cascades of cold water. He set up the test, and then sat back and waited. Did He care? Of course He did, and part of His care was this exam to test their progress. Alas, they failed the test. But without that obvious faith-failure and stern rebuke (in tomorrow's reading) they might have been proud and arrogant that they were all right, simply because Jesus chose them.

However much we may understand of the Word, the key question is, "Can we do it"? Without a realistic estimate of our spiritual progress we will be shallow disciples, at risk of arrogance, self-deception and incompetence. None of these would be good in a lawyer, brain surgeon or pilot - so ought the church to breed them? The tests set for us by the Lord are usually more severe than we would like, at the wrong time for us and certainly not designed to boost our egos. But they are a vital part of the Christian life, if we are to be of use in the Master's service.

**Prayer:** *Father God, thank you that you care so much about me, that you set tests to evaluate my progress in faith. Help me to trust you; and let that trust be the basis of my reactions to the distress or trials, that I would not have chosen for myself. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W052**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 4:39-41** *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (NIV)*

Immediately the disciples failed the faith-test with an overdose of fear, Jesus comes to the rescue. He has no interest in destroying them, and is amazingly compassionate when His people fail: but He does not want to leave them there. Growing in faith is a Gospel essential, and here Jesus was quite stern in rebuke. Sometimes a well aimed question is more effective to stir thinking, than a bald statement of disapproval. Again, Jesus wanted them to learn from their mistake. They needed to learn to trust in Him at all times and every circumstance, otherwise they could not lead His church.

However, the solution to their problem (a flat sea) proved to be another test: another opportunity to believe in Jesus. But as the story goes on, it is clear that the disciples had no idea that Jesus was God. Yet the disciples were more afraid of the power of Jesus (to subdue wind and water) than of sinking! Nevertheless, the whole episode forced them past a concern for their personal safety ... to confront the key question of the Gospel, "Who is this man?" That was the point that Jesus wanted them, and indeed everybody, to reach.

Much time may be wasted with friends and colleagues talking about church or religion, when the only question that needs an answer is, "Who is this man, Jesus". The more we see of His power, the more reason we have to advertise the answer ... that will lead them to salvation.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank you for all the amazing things you have done for me - let me remember with awe and worship, just who you are. Help me not to be satisfied to keep you as my 'secret' friend - my family, friends and colleagues need to know who you are, and I can tell them! In Christ's Name, Amen.*

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**W@W053**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:1-5** *They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no-one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No-one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (NIV)*

The storm has been stilled, and the disciples taught vital lessons in faith. The next challenge was a demonised man! From overwhelming waves - to a face to face encounter with a man who nobody could tame. These verses provide graphic evidence of his wild violence. Superhumanly strong, but at the same time he had been robbed of his God-given dignity. Inside, he was a mess ... disturbed and distraught: outside he was self mutilating. This man had a problem that nobody could control, and nor could he. He was propelled away from the living to make his home among the dead.

His problem was an evil spirit who had assumed the right to dominate him; body, mind and spirit. And it is clear from the way which Jesus dealt with that spirit (as we will see in the next reading) that He had no doubt that evil personalities (demons) can take over people's lives. This was not a defect of the man's mind, but an invasion of his spirit. So why did the man come to meet Jesus? Satan's nature is bent on confronting God, attempting to prove his petty power. That was the essence of the wilderness encounter. If Satan can get Jesus on the ropes ... then all hell is let loose.

But what a sad specimen Satan's victim had become. Indeed, all who swallow his evil lures are unable to be at peace with others or even themselves. So Jesus has come to set such people free - and by a far greater power than they are bound by. That is the promise of the Gospel for all who will come to Jesus. So when the Lord gets you involved and out of your depth, remember that Jesus has come to destroy the works of the Evil One (1 John 3:8b). Don't back off, in the power of the Holy Spirit administer truth in the Name of Jesus!

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father. I bring to you those who I know who are unable to control themselves; I believe that you can release them and set them free. When things get too much for me to handle, I know that Your power is more than sufficient to meet the need. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W054**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:6-8** *When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" (NIV)*

Satan's dilemma is that, at the same time, he both hates and fears God. Demons are programmed to wreck the work of God, yet they know that He will punish them. This demonised man was propelled to confront Jesus, and yet could not avoid falling down to beg His mercy. The reality is that all who stand against the Lord must finally submit to Him. That will happen when Jesus returns: on that day many will be in deep grief when their 'worst fears' are realised (Rev. 1:7).

For this demon, it looked as though that day had come early and the terrifier was terrified. In fear of the pain of hell, it knew that Jesus has been given the right to consign the damned to its terrors. The commanding word of Jesus spells 'exit' to every evil power. It is the same today: it explains the bizarre double motives and standards of apparently 'normal' people who refuse to submit to Jesus - despite their rebellion, somewhere, they fear His overwhelming power.

The Christ-people should have no illusions. Jesus has not come to make the world a nicer place, but to dispossess evil of its power. That is why the gospel is so offensive to those in sin's grip (even if they do not know it). The good news of Jesus - is very bad news for the spiritual powers, which have seized control of the world. Strangely, those under their spell are both attracted and repelled to all that smells of Christ. So He gives us the weapon of His Word: it is the 'sword' He has placed in our hands. It is designed to root out evil - and bring release for many captives. It is not for physical violence or intimidation, but spiritual authority. Use it! Use it today! In Jesus' Name.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank you that Your command sets free those who are trapped by Satan's power. Help me to value your Word, not to be ashamed of it, and ready to use it. May it be seen to be my rule for life and a guiding light for those in darkness. Give me courage to share what the Bible says with my colleagues and work contacts. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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## Word@Work from BeaconLight

**Read Mark 5:9-13** *Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. (NIV)*

Interestingly, Jesus never rebukes demonised people, but spoke to the evil spirit and demanded its name. His authoritative command forced evil to reveal its nature. There was not one demon but many. Jesus had selected a man terrorised by a legion of spirits - a seething pot of evil. Jesus was to show that He had power to heal the most wickedly corrupted person, and throw Satan's forces out ... for ever.

For demons to barter their fate with Jesus may seem rather odd. But think of them as viruses: they can only live by taking over the living cells of a host. They would prefer the honour of drowning pigs than being without something to terrorise. Perhaps it was a measure of the number of demons exorcised by Jesus, that 2,000 pigs were so disturbed as to plunge into the lake.

When Jesus speaks, He does so with powerful effect. We must be both encouraged and challenged: encouraged that Jesus has far greater power than even the worst of evil; and challenged that He has placed His Word into our hands - what a responsibility. This should spur us to trust Him more, in the apparently impossible situations of today and tomorrow; and to dare to apply His Word where evil is at its worst.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank You - that You have supreme authority and power: nobody is stronger than You. Please help me to believe this truth, and to trust You when things get impossibly out of hand. You can save people out of the worst places: so please help me to say what is true from Your word and point them to You. In the Name of Jesus. Amen*

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**W@W056**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:14-17** *Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man - and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. (NIV)*

2000 pigs drowned caused quite a stir. The Gentile farmers had lost a good income - and there was no insurance. The swine-herds had failed in their duty; they needed to blame someone - so Jesus was the obvious choice. As the story went round the local towns, crowds flocked to the hillside (to see what had happened). Some would have been angry at their commercial loss; others just curious.

When they arrived at the 'scene of the crime', there was little appetite for salvaging pork carcasses. What riveted their attention, far more, was the man with the reputation for extreme violence. He was now sitting quietly (not rampaging in a frenzy), dressed (instead of naked), and in his right mind (rather than distraught or wild). Mark records their reaction to the scene - utter fear ... of Jesus!

Why should Jesus produce that reaction? Clearly, He was more powerful than the distraught man. He was more powerful than 2000 pigs, and more powerful than the Devil himself. And He still is. Those who resist Christ, get used to coping with an evil world but believe they are in control - sad really; because they are not. When Jesus proves that He is the Master, He challenges every other authority to submit to Him. That is why even nice people want Him to go away. This may help you to pray for your colleague or neighbour; they are simply scared of having to submit to the Lord.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. You are the Master - and I am glad. I pray for my friends who are scared to let you into their lives. Please help me to show them how much You love them, and what You have done for me. In Jesus' Name. Amen*

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**W@W057**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:18-20** *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (NIV)*

Jesus was not wanted there. The town and country people considered him too hazardous. But one man knew differently. The naked violent psychopath, was now dressed and fully rational - and he knew that if it had not been for Jesus, his life could never have been changed.

He begged Jesus to allow him to join the disciples. This was not the terrified pleading of the demons in verse 12, or the desperate demands of the people (to get rid of Jesus) in verse 17. This man was so 'on-side' with the Son of God that it was painful for him to be left without Him. Perhaps he thought that if Jesus left, the demons would come back. But Jesus had left His mark of authority on the man: he was both saved and safe. And (although he did not initially realise it), he was now a part of the 'family business of God and Sons' (cf John 1:12) ... and there was work to do.

Unlike the disciples on their training course (learning how to lead the church), this born-again man was simply told to tell his family how much the merciful Lord had done for him. Even today, some Christians like the idea of being important in the fellowship - but have difficulty in straightforward verbal witness to those close at hand. Those who have been changed by Christ ... should say so! It is always a 'today' task. You will be surprised at the reactions of your colleagues: some will be amazed to hear your story. So why not tell it, look out for the opportunity; today!

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord Jesus. I am truly grateful for all the wonderful way You have changed my life. Help me to be so confident in the truth of what you have done, that I will never be ashamed to say that I belong to you, and why. Give me the wisdom to realise that witnessing to my family and work friends is as much Christian ministry - as any service within the church. For your Name's sake. Amen.*

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**W@W058**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:21-24a** *When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered round him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him. (NIV)*

Another 'pleading' today. This time, a sincere cry for help. The little girl was seriously ill, and her father (despite being a religious leader) knew that only Jesus could help. It is a mark of godly wisdom to run straight to Jesus, irrespective of whatever religion you have known. Power to change the inevitable is only in the hand of God: in dynamic relationship, not in a pious formula.

Jesus affirmed that His compassion by moving through the crowd, following the anxious cleric. However much he was worried, he had real faith that Jesus could heal. Whatever his religious scruples, Jairus had enough evidence to believe in Jesus, and to risk his reputation in this very public appeal for life-saving assistance. "If it matters that much", somebody once said, "you have nothing to lose by being public about it". By contrast, secrecy betrays shame and fear.

Why are we so reluctant, today, to encourage a direct approach to Jesus Christ? He is the only one with power to heal the outside and clean the inside. It is not magical incantations we need, but a masterful saviour. Ask people if you can pray for them in their difficulty: it is a simple step but gets right to the heart of leading people to understand that God cares, hears and has the power to act. And every real Christian can do it! So, why not you? Today?

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father. I know enough of Your loving care to continue to commit myself to you. Give me the desire to be more public about what I know you can do for others - not just to fix their problems but to save their souls. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W059**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 5:24b-29** *A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (NIV)*

We all like to feel well. After twelve years of misery (by the sound of it - made worse by the doctors), the woman came to Jesus. She had nothing to offer Him except her need of healing. Despite the pressing crowds, she believed that He was her only hope, and that even to touch His clothes would bring her a new life. Of course, she was right - and her act of faith was rewarded.

However importantly we think of physical well-being, all the healing miracles of the Bible have a deeper meaning. They are signs that Jesus can reach into the impossible and change people, radically, from the inside. They simply believed in Jesus - confident of His willingness and ability to transform their hopeless condition. Here, after mounting medical bills and failed treatments, Jesus showed the power of God in response to faith.

It is the same today: after a catalogue of failed fix-its, peace of mind (and rest of heart) only comes to those who come to Jesus ... in simple faith. As with the woman, the process starts when people hear about the Saviour - and somebody has to tell them! However kind our actions and the sympathy we give, it is only Jesus who can address the problem. So let's make up our minds today to introduce our colleagues to Jesus: He is the only one who can bring sense to the chaos, and peace to the pain.

**Prayer:** *Gracious Father, thank you for Your love that desires the salvation of everybody. Forgive me for thinking that I can fix-it for people, or that my compassion can make the difference without Jesus being centrally involved with my friends and family. Help me to be straightforward, and to introduce them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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**Read Mark 5:30-34** *At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (NIV)*

It does not take much imagination to know that there is a difference between a touch, and a 'touch'. The casual and accidental touch means nothing more than carelessness; but the intentional touch of a blind person, a lover, or a mother to a child is special. It is not the moment of physical contact that matters, but the desire for it and the meaning it holds. Jesus, who was jostled and brushed by many, knew the moment the woman reached out to touch him - and why!

Mark keeps on telling us of people who wanted to respond to Jesus in faith (and the disciples who kept on missing the point!). In this episode, the indifference of his followers was in stark contrast to the bold conviction of the sick woman. She had such faith in Jesus, as we saw yesterday, that she dared to push through the crowd. She ignored her ritual uncleanness which had made her a social leper, because she saw that Jesus Himself was the light at the end of her tunnel. Her faith was simple and direct. We know this is so because she did something about it.

It is just the same today. Many will have their 'brush with religion' at funerals or Christmas. Few will be so convinced that Jesus is the answer ... but those who are, will be amply rewarded. Our faith in Jesus should encourage others to take hold of all that Jesus offers (look at Matthew 11v12). Why are we so embarrassed by those whose zeal oversteps our nice conventions? Is it that we have forgotten what it is like to be so lost, that we are desperate to be found; so hopeless, that we believe it is Jesus who offers the only hope?

**Prayer:** *Dear loving Lord, thank you for the bold enthusiasm of those who look to you for everything. Help me to see that you have done everything for me, that I may be bold to keep on reaching out to Jesus - and encourage others to seize hold of Him too. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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