

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 and Mark 1:21-28

Well, there has been a lot in the news lately about the power of people in authority...and it is not always good. We so often are drawn to those who exhibit power...think of any group you are in....it is often the boldest, the brightest, the noisiest...the ones whom we perceive to be the most knowledgeable and qualified ...to whom we give authority and sometimes this works out just fine but other times it does not. Sometime, the most powerful in a group, limits the voices of others.

And as we are coming to painfully realize, sometimes people in places of authority, take advantage....of women, of children, of those who have seemingly no voice....and we realize there is a danger here. But as we are seeing now, people are rising up from places of abuse to tell their stories...and then *their* voices take on some authority....and the world pays attention! Sometimes someone speaks the truth so plainly and strongly....that others listen and then ask, "Who is this?"

Many of you probably heard Oprah Winfrey speak at the Golden Globe awards...here is a bit of what she said, "What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. And I'm especially proud and inspired by all the women who have felt strong enough and empowered enough to speak up..."

When I hear about someone who stands up for justice against all odds...I get that catch in my throat...it is moving, inspiring and somehow it feels holy.

Let us be in prayer: Powerful God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

First we hear Moses speaking near the end of his life to the people of Israel who are about to enter a promised land, without Moses with them. In this book of Deuteronomy, Moses proclaims that there will be other prophets who will come and speak in God's name, with wisdom and inspiration. But there will also be false prophets with whom God will not be happy.

So our challenge has always been, I suppose, to figure out who is speaking from a place of truth. It is often obvious who has integrity, who speak from places of wisdom and humility and faith. It is often clear whose goals come from the desire to be generous...who lead from a desire for the betterment of all humankind. It is sometimes trickier to recognize those who lead from a place of greed and self-interest.

Jesus came to Capernaum....a town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He walked into a synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. The curious thing about this passage is that we do not know anything about what he actually taught...just that people were amazed at this young man who spoke with such authority, whatever it was he said....

Mark writes that Jesus was not at all like other religious leaders. We have to be careful here that we do not take this to mean that Jewish teachers of the day did not also have truth to share, indeed, they also taught about the compassion of God...but it was just that Jesus appeared to be teaching differently...and they were surprised by his words and actions.

And it was the actions, in this passage, that seemed to "speak louder than words!" The writer of Mark moves us quickly to a dramatic exorcism! Jesus called out the "unclean spirit" within a man....and the people were amazed. Where did this power come from? Who was this who could even command unclean spirits?

In Mark's typical urgent fashion, he says that "at once", Jesus' fame spread throughout the region.

Theologian Gary Charles writes, "The exorcism story drips with irony as Jesus, a man possessed by the Spirit of God, faces off with a man possessed by a demonic spirit.... Mark signals that no oppressive boundary will stand or withstand the power of Jesus"... *No oppressive boundary could withstand the power* of Jesus....and so people began to believe that it was the Voice of God who spoke through him.

Charles goes on to say that readers of Mark's Gospel see that the "boundary-breaking, demon-dashing, law-transcending Son of God has arrived in the person of Jesus--- and what Jesus expects of his followers, is far more than 'amazement'."

Have you thought of Jesus in this way? Have you imagined Jesus with power enough to cast out all that is deceitful, evil and unhealthy?

This is a miracle story....and I found some writing by your friend, Howard Kee. He attended this church in the summer-times until his later years...this was before I came and I am sorry I did not get to know him. As a New Testament scholar, Howard Kee wrote these words: "In Jesus' time, it was neither medicine nor magic. We moderns think of the former: a diagnosis is needed, treatments and the like. Some ancients thought of the latter; a curse has been pronounced, one that needs to be broken." But Kee notes, "The ministry of Jesus posits another possibility---miracle."

Jesus' words had the power to heal. There is no doubt that Jesus was a healer. People were relieved of life-long ailments of leprosy, blindness, hemorrhaging and who knows what all. Was it the power of suggestion? Was it that the incredible love of God was incarnated so fully within this man of Jesus...that his words, his touch, even his look, had the power to transform the physical, emotional and spiritual?

Jesus healed...and this contributed to the sense that he was a person of power and authority. But he did not hold this power *over* others for the his own benefit...but for good. This is the Good News. Jesus often left the crowds because healing was not his whole purpose of being there...healing was not the end, but the *means* to teaching about what a relationship with God could mean...a relationship with a higher power.

I want to share a TED Talk that I heard the other day. You all know these TED Talks?... A person is given the stage to tell about something extraordinary in about 15 minutes. They are great...especially if you have a rather short attention span...you don't have to wade through an hour-long lecture to get at the nugget of the thing....and these talks cover a whole range of fascinating topics.

Anyway, this talk was by a woman named Tracy Lind. She said she met God in McDonald's. Well, that catches your attention, doesn't it? She grew up with a Jewish father and a Protestant mother and she loved both practices. She would have a Menorah under her Christmas tree, go to Shabbat on Fridays, synagogue on Saturdays and an Episcopal church on Sundays.

She always questioned...who was God, *how* was God, and what was her path supposed to be. She became ordained in the Episcopal Church... and she continued to ask these questions: Who was God, how was God and what did God have to do with her?

One day, as she walked along 42<sup>nd</sup> street in New York City...she felt a strong voice within her say, "I will never let you go." It startled her so much that she ducked into a McDonald's, sat at a table and took out a piece of paper. For the next half hour, she had a conversation with God. She wrote "Me" for what she was thinking, and "G" for what she heard God telling her.

Being in McDonald's that day completely changed her life. She believes without a doubt that this VOICE within her was from God even as others may name it something different. And here is an amazing thing; she believes that *everyone* has this Voice within them. She says we only need to do 4 things. Ask---wait---listen--- and receive. She believes that Holy Wisdom is actualized by receiving and doing. She said that if

we let our imaginations be really open...each one of us can "dance with this Inner Voice!....and if all of us would do so, what a better world this would be!"

There are different ways, perhaps, that God does speak within each one of us....I cannot say that I have heard a Voice, but I have certainly felt nudges and received ideas that seem to come from somewhere outside of myself. However we hear God speaking to us....I am certainly willing to ask and wait and listen and receive....because, after all, this is who I would like to have "in charge" in my life! How about you?

Amen