

Sunday Sermon
January 21, 2018
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Mark 1:21-28
“A New Authority”

Old Testament Lesson

Moses and the Israelites are in the territory of Moab, west of the Jordan River in the area where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea. For forty years, Moses has led the Hebrew people out of enslavement in Egypt and through the wilderness on their journey to the land God has promised them. Now they are on the verge of that land.

But Moses is nearing the end of his life. He knows he is not going to be able to enter the land of promise. So as a final act, he delivers a farewell address to prepare the people for their entrance into Canaan.

Speaking from his heart in a warm, sermonic way, Moses gives the people a second set of instructions, a second rendering of the law. That is what the name Deuteronomy means, second law. It is actually the same law the Israelites received from God at Mount Sinai, but Moses gives it to the people a second time, here in a kind and personal way.

And Moses tells the people, “I am not going to the land with you, but God is going to raise up a leader for you. In the new land, God will give you someone who will lead you and reveal God to you.” The people trust Moses, and they believe that God will send them a leader, a Messiah.

New Testament Lesson

For the New Testament lesson we go to Mark’s gospel and find Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. And he is beginning to show signs that he is the one for whom the people have been waiting for generations since the days of Moses.

The problem is the people do not remember what Moses and subsequent prophets of the Old Testament said about this one who was to come. That this Messiah would come calling for repentance and justice and righteousness. That this Messiah would come as one of them, with them in their struggles. That he would be a suffering servant.

Mark says Jesus comes speaking with authority. And as he is speaking, he is interrupted by a man possessed. Jesus calls the voices from the man, and the people are impressed with this authority, this power over evil. And Jesus’ fame spreads throughout Galilee.

Keep reading in Mark, and you see how Jesus’ fame and his following continue to grow. But keep on reading, and you see how criticism comes and then rejection. The people do not understand this kind of Messiah. They do not understand this new authority.

Story

When my husband and I were in seminary, we were members of a secret society. We pledged allegiance to that society and promised never to tell anyone that it existed. So I am going to share this with you, but you have to promise not to tell anybody. It does not go out of this room, okay?

This secret society which we were invited to join was called the Sons of the Prophets. But then I joined it, so they changed the name to the Sons and Daughters of the Prophets. Once a month this group, this secret society, would invite one of the professors to meet with us. We would meet off campus, because after all, we were secret.

We would invite the professor to join with us in a restaurant, and in return, we would pay the cost of his dinner. And for the price of his dinner, we could ask the professor anything we cared to ask. We could delve into the professor's mind and challenge his thinking and, in turn, challenge our thinking.

One month we invited Dr. Carlyle Marney, a legend among American preachers and the author of several books, including *Priests Unto Each Other*. That night we were sitting at table talking, and Luther Rickenbacker, one of our friends in the society, asked Marney an edgy question.

Marney looked at Luther, leaned forward in his seat, pointed his long, boney finger right at him and said, "Luther." Marney had God's voice, you know the kind of voice that all ministers wish they had, even women.

"Luther," he said, "you want to be a prophet, don't you son?"

And Luther said emphatically, "I sure do."

And Marney said, "Luther, before you can be a prophet, you have got to sit by a lot of hospital beds. You have got to hold a lot of hands and say a lot of prayers. Before you can be the people's prophet, Luther, you have got to be their priest. They have got to know you care about them, or they will not listen to what you have to say."

Teaching

Mark says Jesus comes speaking with authority, but Mark shows the authority comes not so much from what Jesus says but from what he does, his acts of compassion, his healings.

The epistle of Hebrews says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." Jesus is acquainted with our sorrows. Jesus knows our grief and suffering. He has been wounded with our afflictions. He knows us, cares for us, loves us.

Matthew's gospel has the Sermon on the Mount; Luke's gospel has the Sermon on the Plain. These sermons include profound teachings by Jesus. But Mark, Mark has no words of preaching or teaching by Jesus. Do not look for the words of a

sermon from Jesus in Mark. They are simply not there. Mark is satisfied simply to say that when Jesus speaks, he speaks with authority. And when Jesus heals, he heals with authority. What Mark wants to do is introduce us to Jesus, not to Jesus' words, but to Jesus. Mark shows us Jesus is our prophet because first he is our priest.

Story

A young minister wanted to be a good preacher. She wanted to learn how to preach well. So she decided that she would get people in her congregation to give her feedback about her sermons.

Every Sunday at the door as people came to worship, young people handed out questionnaires for the people to complete. "What was the point of the sermon? What new thing did you learn from the sermon?"

Every week the minister would read the feedback. Then she would go and look at her sermon, and she was astonished. Nothing the people said was anything like what she thought she said in her sermon. They just do not get it, she thought. They do not understand anything I am trying to teach them.

Finally a dear saint of the church visited the minister, "Whatever gave you the idea that we come to church to listen to what you have to say?" she asked. "We come to church to meet Jesus. What we want to hear is that Jesus has not given up on us. If you can be our pastor and help us meet Jesus and know that he has not given up on us, you have done what you need to do."

Conclusion

That is why we are here today. We have come to meet Jesus and walk out of this room knowing Jesus has not given up on us.

So friends, here are the words you have come to hear:

We have a high priest who with authority speaks and cares for us.

He sympathizes with our weaknesses,

He is acquainted with our sorrows.

He knows our suffering and our grief.

He is wounded with our afflictions.

He knows us. He cares for us. He loves us.

And he has not given up on us.

And that is the message we want, we need to hear.