

“What Do You Want With Us, Jesus?”

Sermon for Season of Epiphany, Sunday, February 1, 2015
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur, Georgia
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Deuteronomy 18: 15- 22 Mark 1: 21-28

Deuteronomy 18: 15- 22

A New Prophet Like Moses

¹⁵ The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.

¹⁶ This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.”

¹⁷ Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹ Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. ²⁰ But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

²¹ You may say to yourself, “How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?” ²² If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.

Mark 1: 21-28

The Man with an Unclean Spirit

²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²² They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

²³ Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴ and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, **“Be silent, and come out of him!”** ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

²⁷ They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

*They were all amazed,
and they kept on asking one another,
“What is this? A new teaching—with authority!”* – Mark 1:
27a

Jesus Christ walked into a house of worship
and turned it on its ear by teaching with authority.
The Holy Bible speaks of the Sabbath day
that Jesus of Nazareth and his followers
strolled into the synagogue in Capernaum.

Then Jesus began to teach.
His preaching unpacked the mysteries and messages of the
Holy Scriptures,
and then he healed a man overcome with an unclean
spirit.
The people nudged one another,
and commented that Jesus spoke as one with
authority,
and not like the scribes.
“*What is this? A new teaching—with authority!*” – Mark 1:
27a

Clearly, this Jesus fellow is not like the scribes.
He was not like those who go through the motions,
nor like those who preach without joy or sincerity,
nor like those who speak without a convincing
voice,
and especially not like those whose
deeds do not match their words.
Here in the sanctuary of the Lord -- *at last, thanks be to
God!* --
was one whom the people of the congregation and the
community could trust.

How do you know what voices to heed, to respect, to follow,
to trust and obey?

Recently at a sporting event I saw a man wearing a bright
orange t-shirt that said,
“*I always do whatever the voices in my wife’s head tell me
to do.*”

You know, we smile but there is more truth here than we
care to admit.
Folks are hearing odd voices and sounds,

strange directions, disturbing calls to action,
and many of us are unclear about what to do or
whom to trust.

In the Bible, we are afforded an opportunity to observe love
in action.

May these holy teachings become lived out in the faith
community and across the city.

Jesus was teaching in the temple, and...

²³ Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an
unclean spirit,

²⁴ and he cried out,

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us?

I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, *“Be silent, and come out of
him!”*

²⁶ And the unclean spirit,

convulsing him and crying with a loud voice,
came out of him.

The fact that the Gospel of Mark places this exorcism
in the midst of Jesus’ instructing about God
directs our undivided attention on the power of
His teaching.

In the Gospel of Mark,

the teaching power of the love of God “is connected
with miracles:

Jesus the teacher stills a storm, (Chapter 4:38)

Jesus the teacher raises a dead girl, (Chapter
5:35)

Jesus the teacher feeds the hungry crowd,
(Chapter 6:34)

Jesus the teacher cures an epileptic, (Chapter 9:17)
and Jesus the teacher curses a fig tree (Chapter 11:21).” (Fred Craddock, p. 142)

Are you starting to get the idea that we associate
the teaching power of Jesus
with God’s power to heal,
God’s promise to resurrect,
God’s desire to feed the hungry,
God’s will to transform?

When everyone was stunned into silence the unclean spirit
cried out,
saying, “*What do you want with us, Jesus?*”
Jesus cast out the unclean spirit, commanding it to be silent
and gone;
yet echoes of the question hover in the air and
demand an answer.
What do you want with us, Jesus?

Be open and willing to follow the Word of God.
Make the connection.
Associate Christ’s teaching with your life and relationships.

There is a biblical, spiritual and ecclesial connection
between the sound of someone teaching with
authority
and the results of human transformation.

There is also significant disconnect in our lives and culture
between the sounds we hear and the Word we are to
follow.

How do you discern the sounds you hear? Which ones are
we to heed?

Was that sound you heard
holy, from God, a divine gift from above and within?

Was that sound you heard
a blessing, a missive, a testament, a sigh too deep for
words?

Was that sound you heard
a promise, a prayer, a proclamation, a prophecy?

Was that sound you heard
a word of preparation, affirmation, or confirmation?

Or was the sound only noise?
How can you tell the difference?
How do you discern whether the voices you hear are holy?

How do you know when the sounds you hear are holy,
whether the voice or voices you hear are helpful or
hurtful?

Let's start with your favorite, most trusted Litmus Test.

My desktop dictionary defines a litmus test as:

1. A test for chemical acidity or basicity using litmus paper.
2. A test that uses a single indicator to prompt a decision.

I am blessed to be a member of a civic service club called
Rotary International.

Rotarians draw deep upon the **The Four-Way Test**.
The Four Way Test, which has been translated into more
than 100 languages,

asks the following questions:

Of the things we think, say or do

1. Is it the TRUTH?

2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Another positive Litmus Test is whether the voices you hear and are asked to heed

will direct your life to be harmful or hurtful.

For example, a surgeon must make an incision to operate, and her craft leaves a scar and the necessity of painful therapy,

yet the hurt inflicted is a part of the healing.

On the other hand, a soul who is self-centered or selfish or self-righteous

may seek to intentionally harm others

for the sake of perpetuating a cause or idea.

Dare to ask whether at the core of the voice you hear, will it lead you to heal or harm?

As people of faith we are invited to turn to the Holy Scriptures

for blessed guidance on how to discern the difference between noise and voice,

between sounds and spiritual direction.

God, who loves you and knows your name and your needs, calls out to you.

You know God's voice because you know God.

Jesus says, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*"

The better we get to know God, to love God, to serve and follow God's ways, the more clearly we will recognize God's voice.

God's voice is the movement and expression

of the Holy Spirit -- the Spirit of Love --
so we can affirm and confirm
that the voice of God
is the sound of love.
Love is the Litmus Test.

What do you want with us, Jesus?
How about some love?

Allow me to encourage this church and community to apply
the Litmus Test of love
to those in our world today who proclaim that they hear the
voice of God,
and tell us that they know exactly what you and I should do
and how we should live and serve.
This week let's practice some holy listening
and see whether it makes a difference,
see whether we can tell who speaks with divine
authority,
see who has at heart the best interest of
the human condition.

Some Holy rollers tell us to prepare for the rapture, for the
end of days.
Some who call for a Holy Jihad advocate violence as a
solution to misunderstandings.
Some who call themselves holy prophets proclaim a gospel
that in no way reflects the God of love and forgiveness
I have personally encountered.

Our spiritual ancestors had the same concerns and
questions.
In Deuteronomy 18, the Lord provided wise counsel
by putting God's own self in our shoes and addressing
our concerns:

*²¹ You may say to yourself,
“How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not
spoken?”*

*²² If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord
but the thing does not take place or prove true,
it is a word that the Lord has not spoken.
The prophet has spoken it presumptuously;
do not be frightened by it. (Deuteronomy 18: 21-22)*

In other words, do not fear and do not heed
prophetic words that are not grounded in love,
words whose results do not point to the nature
and nurture of God.

For example, the small, Topeka-based Westboro Baptist
Church

may be protected by the Constitution of the United
States.

This does not mean their words or placards are in the
remotest way holy,

signs which read “God Hates Gays” and “Jews Killed
Christ”

while they demonstrate at the funerals of
soldiers

who gave the ultimate sacrifice to their
country.

Hateful words and prejudiced opinions are never holy,

nor do they speak a prophetic or pastoral word

for, to, or on behalf of the Church of Jesus
Christ.

Here in the south we like to say that *“love is blind, but the
neighbors aren’t.”*

We see what is really going on.

And if we don’t, if we misread a detail, if we mistake the

holiness in our midst,
trust that those whom you trust will get it.

Trust that those who truly, deeply love you
will share and be the Good News for you.

Sometimes we need to heed the insights and observations
of those whom we do trust,
those who have our best interest at heart,
those who care and listen,
those who are connected to the
holy,
those who know and follow the Good
Shepherd,
those who faithfully discern the
difference
between noise and the voice of
God.

Maybe we could expand our southern expression
from love is blind
to love is deaf, but the neighbor's aren't.
Connecting to the holy voice of God with God's power to
transform and redeem
will make you a better person and build a better
world.

Make the connection.
Integrate into your daily life the steady drumbeat of God's
Word.

The Lamb of God trusts the confirming Word of the Lord,
who is our Shepherd,
*"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters."* (Psalm 23: 1-2)

You see, my friends, the Lord will provide.
The providential care of the Lord starts with the Word.
The Lord provides a Word
 that can sound so much like rolling thunder,
 like the laughter of a child,
 like the pause between the notes,
like the steady breathing of your beloved,
 like the cries for freedom and justice from the
oppressed,
 like a still, small voice whispering in
 your ear, saying,
“I have glorified Jesus, and I will glorify Him again.”
Yes, you heard that.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen!*