

Jesus the Prophet Deuteronomy 18:17a, 18-19 Mark 1:21-28

Today's Gospel reading tells us about Jesus' first public teaching after he has been baptized and called the disciples. It is clear from the scripture that Jesus has a very different quality to his teaching than the people are used to hearing. The word used to describe the unique quality of Jesus' teaching is authority so I thought it best to start with that theological book the Miriam-Webster Dictionary on the computer/ The quick-read definition did not give me much, it seemed pretty logical:

au·thor·i·ty noun : the power to give orders or make decisions : the power or right to direct or control someone or something

: the confident quality of someone who knows a lot about something or who is respected or obeyed by other people

: a quality that makes something seem true or real

OK, I thought, but then I noticed below the first screen the full definition was offered. Upon looking at it I was started by the #1 definition of authority:

(1) : a citation (as from a book or file) used in defense or support (2) : the source from which the citation is drawn

The light bulbs began to go off. The first six letters of authority spell author – authority is not about power – but is first about the author – the Creator of life. Jesus has authority, not because he has power, but Jesus has power because of the Author of it all: God the Father/Mother God the first Cause. God most High.

This is when I remembered the words of Deuteronomy where God tells Moses there will be a Prophet (or some translations say “prophets” – plural) that will be like Moses – speaking for God to the people. This is when the obvious became clear to me. Jesus is a Prophet because he speaks on behalf of God to the people. His authority is not in this world. That is the difference between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees. They have authority given in this world, by humans. Their whole perspective is from being one of the people exclusively. And so we see here the beginnings of an oft-repeated scenario in the Gospels, where the Pharisees or the Sadducees try to trap Jesus in a “problem” by posing worldly issues. The Sadducees try to use the law to disprove

the resurrection by saying a man married a woman and died before they had children. Then – per the Law of Moses, his brother married her and also died before an heir was born to the first brother and so the next brother. Finally the woman dies without having children, And so they ask Jesus – whose wife will she be in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a logical question from a human perspective. They think they have him trapped, but Jesus says, “people are not given in marriage in the Kingdom of Heaven.” They asked the question from the human perspective, but that is not the right context from which to answer the question. Jesus speaks with God’s words. Jesus knows that from God’s perspective the question is not a problem.

This is also true when Jesus faces the Pharisees as they try to trick him. They bring a woman found in the act of adultery. The Law said she should be taken to the edge of the village and stoned. Jesus did not say, “don’t do it,” because Jesus knew that is what the Mosaic Law said. Instead –from the perspective of God the All Merciful – the God whose forgiveness is always greater than our sins, Jesus says, “Go ahead, let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”

There are two common human responses to law. The first is to want to enforce it strictly and quickly when the breaker of the law is someone else. I fall prey to this when I try to turn onto 64 going toward Church in rush hour on Thursday and people going the opposite way block me because they blow through the yellow and don’t consider anyone else...Now you see why I need the meditation service Thursday night. The second tendency is to push any flexibility in the Law to the maximum to our own advantage. Again a personal example, in tax season I pay an accountant so I will pay the least amount I can legally. But what If I were I to look at taxes in terms of what the Government provides me for them; protection, both locally and nationally; roads and public transportation; safe food, drinks, products, and air travel, help for those in need (like I was when I was on unemployment in the 1990s) I might take a different path when it comes to my taxes. But lest you are concerned I am suggested this as the only right path, I am not gonna do that

But change in perspective is what shows us Jesus is a Prophet – because a prophet sees a different picture than a regular human being. A prophet is set-apart – which is the real meaning of “Holy” (it does not get the ethical purity addition until much later). Jesus and all the Prophets of the Old Testament are instructed to live in the world, but not be of the world. That is why Jesus can go forward knowing that pretty much all prophets are eventually rejected and killed by the people. He knows that his authority and his perspective is from another world - the Realm of God. And that nothing – nothing that happens in this world has any real authority over him. Because its’ authors –even the mighty Roman Proconsul who sentences him to death, only have authority because the Real Author –God allows it. Prophets see things deeper from a new perspective which allows them to act differently. In our scripture, Jesus was confronted with a Demon that declared who he was. Now I am going to save the discussion of how we as modern people deal with demons in the scriptures for another time, but suffice it to say that for those listening to Jesus; a Demon is from the realm of the Spirit – and is more powerful than a human. Jesus shows his authority over the demon, not by destroying it or as happens in modern SciFi thrillers, sending it back to a hell where Satan is in power – Jesus just releases the man from the torment of the demon. Because prophets release the captives and set us free. Jesus does this in spite of his own self-interest. Imagine what crowds Jesus would draw with a demon-filled human as a warm up act. Jesus could have had a sure-fire self-promotion scheme, but Jesus does not need self-promotion. He is not trying to be popular in the world, he is bringing God’s message that he knows will be rejected by most. That is why he often says, “let those who have ears to hear; hear my words.”

In the Gospels, Jesus tells demons to be quiet about who he is. He even tells his disciples to keep it a secret. I’ve never heard an adequate explanation for that until this scripture. Jesus does not seek to be a success in the world, not his job (or ours either) Jesus seeks to bring the message of God’s love to those who will hear.

The Church is called to be Jesus' voice in the world today. We are called to be Prophetic like he was. This is not easy. There is a temptation to just be nice – to try to be popular- get more people to come to church so we can do some good things and have an uplifting worship and make a little difference in the world.. But that is not really our job. Our job is to see things differently and to communicate that to those who have ears to hear in order to witness God radically transform the world; one person, one place one issue at a time. Now I am not saying we shouldn't be nice. But sometimes loving our neighbor means respectfully challenging the status quo and ruffling feathers. If we have to choose between justice and being nice – then we must choose justice

We gather at this table to remember a Passover so long ago. It was Jesus' last meal before being arrested, tried and crucified. We remember that he calls us - his disciples not only to remember him, but to follow him.

On that night Jesus took the bread and after giving thanks: *Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*. Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth... He broke it saying this is my body broken for you Then after supper he took the cup and after giving thanks *Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei peri hagafen* Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth the fruit of the vine
He said this cup is the true relationship with God whose power is signified by my blood shed for many. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you remember me until I come again.

The Prophet Jesus is the host of this table, and invites all who seek to remember and follow him to share in this meal of joy. Come for all is prepared.