



Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 1 Cor. 7:32-35 Mark 1: 21-28

After the call of the first disciples Mark moves to present a picture of Jesus at work. The journey begun by the lake now moves to Capernaum. The ministers of God's saving work must go to the people.

The day begins in the synagogue. This is the place where the word of God is proclaimed, meditated on, and discussed. Jesus offers some teaching. The invitation was often extended to visitors to comment on the Readings. Such a custom provided the community with differing viewpoints.

Jesus' words affected the people deeply. They perceived a different quality in the teaching. They perceived a different kind of authority behind the words which contrasted with the usual teaching from the Scribes.

Scribes were professional religious experts on the Law or Torah. The scribes that Jesus knew were probably Pharisees but all religious groups had their scribes. These experts were first of all defenders of the tradition, hence their tendency to be particular about the letter of the Law. They would also be wary of those they considered amateurs.

In his Gospel, Mark will continue to present Jesus as Teacher. The authority of Jesus will be established not only with words but also with deeds.

The teaching and discussion is interrupted. Into the synagogue breaks a man suffering from a disorder which caused convulsions. He challenges Jesus by yelling abusively. Jesus addresses the disturbed spirit in the man.

"Be muzzled!" This is a strong word and conveys more than the usual rendering of the word as "be silent!".

Jesus is saying that there is only one Word to be uttered and that is the Word of God. This is echoed in 1:34 where Mark says that Jesus would not permit the demons to speak. The utterings of the mentally disturbed were considered to be the work of demons. In the second part of the drama Jesus expels the disturbed spirit. Thus the ministry of healing begins.

One of the great wonders of the Gospels is the way the evangelists pack so much into so few words. In the course of a few sentences

Mark establishes Jesus in his ministry and sets the scene for the pattern of discipleship.

The reading from Deuteronomy reminds us about the nature of the true Prophet. Moses is the template. The prophet is raised up by God to preach God's word. Authentic prophecy is about the extension of the reign of God. It can never be about the ego of the prophet.

Jesus is established as Prophet through his authority which is recognised by the people. It is the ordinary people who are able to discern what is authentic.

This is one of those paradoxes that occur in the Gospels. Ordinary people then were quite good at discerning where to find God in situations that were at variance with official teaching, just as they are today.

If Jesus said, "I have come to proclaim liberty to captives," then the people have the obligation to speak out against anything that binds unjustly, especially when it seems to have religious sanction.

The healing that concludes the story reminds us that the goal in challenging the "disturbed spirits" in the community is wholeness for everyone. Paul says very hopefully, "I would like you to be free from worries." He suggests that it is our perspective that might be faulty. Reflection on the Word of God will help us, as community, to discern how to bring new creation out of dis-ease.

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