

As one with authority

Deut.18.15-20

Mark 1.21-28

It's always dangerous when someone says they know the will of god. Remember Pat Robertson after the world trade center destruction. God, he said, had lifted the curtain of protection around America and allowed the destruction in New York City, because of the evil of that city. Yes, yes, we can hear those kinds of voices and words in the Hebrew Bible. But we feel how repulsive it is for Pat Robertson to exploit the pain of all those victimized by those horrible events so that he can promote his moral and political agenda. Certainly, then, we are to be extremely suspicious of those who know the will of God, who speak without question and with authority and tell us how we should be and what we should do.

Question authority. Be skeptical. Ask why it has to be this way. Use your mind. Probe and push and analyze and agonize. Trust that we are called to be people of visions and hope and that therefore, we are also called to seek and search in order that we might find.

I remember a song from the sixties that opened with the line—I have got something to say sir and I am gonna say it now.

At the same time these texts speak to us about the authority of Moses and then of someone who will come after Moses but who will also be a mediator between God and God's people. So the text tells us (and yes, we do listen to the texts as having special authority) that the people of Israel hungered for a mediator, for someone who could and would go more into the presence of God. Moses as mediator brought the people's concerns to God and then heard the voice of God and brought God's word and law to the people.

So over against our proper skepticism of those who say they hear and know God's will stands our hunger for exactly that—for someone or some way to understand what God is calling us to do and be. Precious Lord—take my hand—help me know who and how to love, how to work for your justice in the world—when to stand up and shout and when to sit down and shut up—when to laugh and when to cry. O god, I could use a little more help here.

Maybe in fact though our hunger for a mediator, for deep and profound experiences of God's will runs much deeper. Maybe we feel ourselves to be severely wounded—total outcasts—beyond the pale of other people's love or Gods. I transferred schools in the middle of my sophomore year. My parents were never much into being clothes for us anyway. I had grown dramatically and my pants all came about 6 inches above my shoes. Walking the halls of Shaker High School that first day after Christmas vacation, knowing no one, being the new kid, seeing everybody in their fancy new sweaters, I felt like an outcast, a stranger in a stranger land.

Jesus taught and teaches with authority. His authority is rooted though not finally in words or in the Torah, but in spiritual power and in God. Yes, he interprets the Hebrew Scripture—but he changes the world—here in this story he casts out the unclean spirits.

When we hear the story, we are startled to hear the unclean Spirit proclaim the Gospel that is to recognize Jesus as the promised Mediator, the new Moses, the son of God. The unclean spirit knows and fears holiness. Holiness, the power of Jesus to bring repentance and change, requires that the spirit come out of the man. The unclean spirits that live in you and me that have gotten quite comfortable, they have settled in quite nicely. When the power of God comes upon, when the spirit overshadows us, when the when our little evil habits and our nasty demons are commanded to come out of us, it hurts. Our psychic balance gets upset and we know that we must live new lives.

Babette's Feast is a short story by Isak Dinesen. You remember the movie *Out of Africa*. That is part of the story of her life. The story is set in a bleak coastal town in Denmark. People have nursed petty grievances against each and are unforgiving even though all members of the same small church. Babette arrives in town and prepares a wonderful feast for everyone in the small community. Through the feast, through the Power, their hardened hearts are transformed—the unclean spirits are cast out of them.

They turn to one another and their eyes are opened and they recognize him present in each other. So we too today prepare for the feast of God, knowing that Christ has come to dwell among us full of grace and truth, speaking with authority and ripping those unclean spirits out of us—even when it hurts.