

Sermon

Jan. 28, 2018

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – B

Based on Deuteronomy 18:15-22

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“Who will speak to God for us when you are gone?” That was the question on the minds of the people as Moses, the one who had led them out of Egypt and to the Promised Land, was getting to where he wouldn’t be around much longer. Mortality was catching up with him. And they were faced with the reality that soon Moses would no longer be with them. Who will fill his shoes?

The people believed they needed someone like Moses who could represent them before God. They were there when God came down upon the holy mountain, with fire and smoke. It frightened the people. They were too afraid to come before God. Someone had to go for them. And that someone was Moses. He had the courage and the capacity to stand in the presence of God and to speak with God. He was able to receive from God the Ten Commandments. He was able to receive from God the instructions God had for the chosen people, so that they would know how to serve and worship the God that had chosen them. Moses was able to be the mediator, when God was angry with the people and the people were complaining about God. But what will happen when Moses dies?

God answers their concern by saying through Moses that God will select among the people one who will be a prophet like Moses. This prophet will not be an outsider, nor an angel. It will be someone they know. And this person will be able to receive instruction from God and pass that word along to the people. God will make sure that someone fills Moses’ shoes.

God was not only going to take care of picking the next prophet, God also set up a system of accountability. God said that if the people do not listen and follow the words spoken by the prophet, that God would hold them accountable. If the prophet speaks words that God did not give, the prophet would die. Yikes! Of course, if the prophet speaks

God's word and the people listen and obey, all is well. Any other course of action, God will hold accountable those who mess up. The people won't take it on themselves to police the prophet, nor the prophet carry out the punishment on the people. God's the one who will maintain accountability. And that's a good thing, because God knows what God wants to say and God sees all that is happening in the world. God is just. If anyone should be in charge of maintaining a system of accountability, it should be God.

The people wanted to know, who will take Moses' place? God answered their question by declaring that God will select the replacement and God will make sure everyone is held accountable. The people have nothing to fear. All will be well.

That was then. But what about now? Is there any way to take this passage from Deuteronomy and apply it to our time and our situation? I believe so. And if this application I have come up with has any level of truth to it, then the answer that God gives to the question of who will speak for God is an answer that impacts all of us.

First of all, who speaks for God today? Who has God chosen to take the place of Moses in our day? I doubt if you have ever wondered that. Remember that the role of Moses was to be a mediator between God and the people. Moses and God could have a conversation with each other. God couldn't talk directly to the people because they were too afraid to be in the presence of God. That's because in Moses' day God's presence was fire and smoke.

But we don't experience the presence of God like that these days. In our time, God's presence is more like light. It's everywhere. It envelopes us like a blanket. God is present in our hearts, in our souls. We can't help but be in God's presence. God is always with us, whether we sense God's presence or not.

And God speaks to us if we are still and listen for that voice. We can have a conversation with God through the practice of prayer. We can hear God call us by our names and invite us to go and tell others what God has spoken into our hearts.

So who speaks for God today? You could say that's the preacher's job. I have received a call to preach, a call that has been validated by the

church, who has given me the authority to stand before you on Sunday morning to share a word from God. But I'm no Moses! And although I am careful about what I say and do my best to speak with clarity what I have been able to interpret from Scripture, I would never presume to say to anyone, "Thus says the Lord." Besides, there are a lot of preachers in the world, many of whom are much better at the craft than I am. There isn't just one person God has appointed to replace Moses in our day. If there were, who would it be?

This got me to thinking. I wonder if God no longer calls someone to fill Moses' shoes any more. And that's because God did select someone long ago to fulfill the role of Moses and this person is still fulfilling that role. What I mean is; could Jesus be the last person to fill the shoes of Moses?

The writer of the gospel of Matthew seemed to think so. It's in Matthew where we read of little baby Jesus having to flee to Egypt with Mary and Joseph, and then later to come out of Egypt back to Israel, just as Moses went from Egypt to the promised land. Moses went up to the mountain to receive God's teaching. Just so, Jesus went up to the mountain to give his teaching to the people in his sermon on the mount.

The writer of the gospel of John sure saw Jesus as filling the role Moses filled of speaking the word of God. All through the gospel Jesus says that he only speaks what the Father has told him to speak. Jesus said that no person comes to the Father except through him. Jesus is the mediator, just as Moses was a mediator. Of course, Jesus took it to the next level, being fully human and fully divine. We believe that Jesus is constantly interceding for us. We believe that Jesus' death and resurrection cleanses us from our sin and gives us the promise of resurrection. It is because of what Jesus has done that we are saved.

So, since Jesus is alive, does he not continue the function of Moses? There is no need for another Moses because that's part of who Jesus is, like a new Moses. Jesus is the one who leads us out of the slavery of sin and into freedom, the one who leads us from death to life, the one who delivers us from hell and ushers us into the Promised Land, the new heavens and the new earth. And he is the one who reveals to us, both in word and by the example of his life, what are God's

commandments for us. Jesus does not just speak the word of God, Jesus *is* the incarnate word of God. Moses was a type of who Jesus is. We no longer need a Moses figure. We have Jesus.

So, who speaks for God? Jesus. But how does Jesus speak? You could say that Jesus speaks through the Scriptures. But what about you and me? Could Jesus speak through us? Back in the days of Moses, God selected people to speak the word of God. And God would pour the Holy Spirit out upon that person so that the prophet could speak. But we read in the Acts that after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out on lots of people. In his first sermon, Peter, who had just been filled with the Holy Spirit, quoted from the prophet Joel who said, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” Has this prophecy not been fulfilled? And if it has, what does this mean for us?

As I see it, the Spirit of God has been poured out on you, and you, and you, upon all of us gathered here, and even on me. That means that all of us have the potential to prophesy. And by prophesy I mean speak on God’s behalf, to be the voice of Jesus in the world. After all, are we not the body of Christ? We are. All of us. All of us.

We live in a world that is full of falsehood. Fake news is just one symptom of the lies we are told and the lies we tell ourselves. People are crying out for truth. People are asking the question, “What is true? Is there any such thing as truth?” We can talk about having facts. Facts are facts. We hear the phrase, “You are entitled to your own opinion but you are not entitled to your own facts.” But if you don’t have all the facts you don’t have all the truth. It’s just partial knowledge. We may never have all the facts in any given situation. It does seem sometimes that truth has the consistency of smoke. People want to know, what is the truth of the matter?

Maybe you and I are God’s answer to that question. I’m not saying you and I know the truth about if there was Russian collusion in the Trump campaign. We don’t know all the facts about everything that’s

going on in the world. But we do know something of what is true. We do know Jesus. We know what Jesus taught and how Jesus lived. We know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Our life can speak what is true. If people are looking for truth, can we show them? Can we answer their question of what God may have to say about the times in which we live?