

## “The Word from God”

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Mark 1:21-28

February 1, 2009

Well, it is great to be back with you for worship. God’s word has always been clear about calling us to gather as a family - calling us to worship together. When I am away from my home church I can understand why God call us into these kinds of families. I am glad to be home. And I am glad to be able to come back to North Dakota where we are blessed to be able to pull on overshoes and parkas and get out into the snow and cool weather. I suspect that somewhere in scripture, God must call His people to bundle up and make of snow angles as a means of evangelism. .... Well, maybe we should search the scriptures a little more closely on that one.

Today we are confronted by some powerful words in scripture. On first reading them I thought they were little more than interesting. But the more I have thought about them - the more profound and important these words seem to be. Here we encounter the people of God wondering about their future in the Old Testament lesson. It is hard to really get the drift of what is being said without knowing that the text comes at the very end of the life of Moses. Moses was so very important to the people in those days. He had been their savior. He had led the fight against the Egyptian Pharaoh that finally brought freedom to slaves as he spoke on behalf of God demanding that the people be allowed to go. He had been the one who spoke to God on Mt. Sinai and brought the Ten Commandments from God to the people. Yes, it is true that the people often got mad at Moses when the journey got tough - but they respected him and trusted what he had to say. They knew that he had a connection with God and sought his leadership. Now he was nearing death and they were going to have to move forward without him. But now the people just did not know who to turn to - who to trust to lead or to speak for God. They were God’s people ..... But one of the really interesting things about the text is that it is apparent that the last thing they wanted was for God to speak more directly to them. I suspect that they were in awe of God but feared God’s power so much that they said that if they ever heard His voice or saw His fire again they would die.

This week I ran across a couple of really interesting quotes. One said: “Here is the reason for the terrible dryness of many Western churches. We have our theologies in order. Our rituals flow smoothly. Many of us are sincerely trying to do what pleases God. The reality, presence and power of God are unheard of, and we are grateful for that. We have the form of religion, but lack the power thereof. This is just as we prefer it. We have forgotten we are God's people, and we have fallen into the worship of American gods.” The second, along the same vein, said: “We have become so concerned with preaching our message to the world, finding our own politically correct niche on the liberal-to-conservative, evangelical-to-Pentecostal, liturgical-to-nonliturgical spectrum of religious life in America that we have lost track of what we were prophetically called to preach.

We have become our own "false prophets," speaking our own message while proclaiming it to be God's word."

The ancient people of God were afraid of getting too close to God. They wanted to hear God's word - but at a discreet distance. They wanted leaders - prophets that would speak the truth of God's word and even had laws that condemned a prophet to death if they presumed to speak a word from God that really was not from God but was of their own design. {By the way - there really is not any suggestion in God's word that He wants us to make snow angles!}

When Jesus came on the scene, the people noticed right away that there was something different about His preaching and teaching. What He had to say was authoritative. It was not simply a repeating of the same old church line. In the words He spoke there was healing and life. He spoke of love and grace and forgiveness and a life lived walking with God. In His words people shed their demons. It was a word of great power because it was a word from God ..... And that word scared the people.

I don't know if I have ever though in terms of being scared of getting too close to God or His word. I suspect that if I had seen the ten plagues that Egypt experienced or watched as the waters of the Red Sea parted or even followed behind a pillar of cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night, maybe I would have been so in awe of God that I would want to avoid having too close a contact with God too. Still, the more I think about that line in our Old Testament text, I find myself thinking that perhaps we are pretty leery of getting too close to God and His word as well.

I read a sermon this week in which the pastor spoke of the church's desire to conform to the demands of our culture rather than to the Word of God. In it the pastor said that we tend to be more ..... Concerned with making an impression instead of making a difference, we have beautiful churches in beautiful neighborhoods and abandoned churches in poor neighborhoods.

..... more concerned with sounding good on tape instead of sounding good to God, we have paid-for choirs and out-of-tune souls.

..... more concerned with being something for everybody, we have special interest groups instead of a special family of God.

..... more concerned with "fitting in" to our culture, but don't worry about 'fit together with one another'.

..... more concerned with sanitizing the messier, unpleasant parts of Scripture, so that we have domesticated God.

..... more concerned with being "politically correct" rather than spiritually urgent, we have made Jesus' love for us beige instead of blood-red.

..... more concerned with "taking stands," we have preached sermons crammed with things we want to get off our chests rather than crammed with messages from God's bosom.

I am saddened to think that such things could be true. I want to think that we are dedicated to hearing, preaching and living the Word of God. Yet, I have to acknowledge that too often I am aware of being scared of the true and powerful Word of God because it may change my life ..... perhaps it is true of us all as a people. So we walk around with our demons and hope that the gathered people of God will continue to be a

comfortable place for us to be. .... Still, Jesus comes ..... calling our demons to be still  
and come out of us. Still Jesus comes to give us life.

AMEN