

"I know Who You Are"

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 & Mark 1:21-28

January 29, 2012

There is a cute little story about a young second lieutenant at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was a hot day and he was thirsty so he stopped at a soft drink machine to get a bottle of pop only to discover that he had no change. As he pondered where to go to get change he saw and flagged down a passing private and asked him, "Do you have change for a dollar?" The private said cheerfully, "I think so, let me take a look." The lieutenant drew himself up stiffly and said, "Soldier, that is no way to address an officer. We'll start all over again. Do you have change for a dollar?" The private came to attention, saluted smartly, and said, "Sir, no, sir!"

The gospel text this morning talks about the power and authority that the people of that day recognized in Jesus. They heard it in what He said and saw it in what he did. I don't know if they snapped to attention - but they certainly took notice. At least part of the difficulty of the text is that the unclean spirit - the demon in the text did too. 'Stay away from me, Jesus - I know who you are!' It is a great line. Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue and now a man walks in that is possessed by an unclean or evil spirit. Now, we could go all nuts trying to figure out the whole evil spirit thing It would be an interesting discussion to find out what you think and believe about such things. But for right now I would like to ask you to simply take the Gospel text on face value - that people in those days believed that almost every illness / every problem was caused by an evil spirit. And here that evil spirit speaks Here the evil spirit reveals its fear and its awareness of the power of Jesus the Christ. "I know who you are." I love that line. "I know who you are - the Holy One of God!"

The people can see that Jesus is unique and has a certain power and authority that they admire But it is an unclean spirit that knows who Jesus is. And knowing, it snaps to attention in awe, begging for mercy.

I have been thinking about that line, "I know who you are!" And I have wondered how many of us would feel confident that we could say the same. Do you know Jesus? Do you know the Christ of God? Do you know God, the Father and Creator? That is the question that I would like you to ponder today.

This past week I saw a snip-it of a You Tube video on the TV news. I am not sure why the national news media picked up on this one 'U-tube' offering. It has, as they said, gone viral. I went and watched the whole 4 ½ minute video a few days ago and saw that it has had well over 17 million views. I thought to show it to you because it has much that is good and thought provoking. But it is also discouraging. The video is entitled, "Why I hate religion but I love Jesus." In a very thoughtful, almost poetic way the author does almost a 'rap' explanation of some of the things that the church has done and failed to do Some of the

ways in which the church has failed or turned away from what God calls us to be. In a number of ways the author was able to convey his beliefs about Jesus and the life that God calls us to live Beliefs that I would guess came from long years of close association with the church before he became discouraged and began to hate the religious establishment and religion in general.

I found it interesting that here was a young man who had obviously been deeply involved with the church at one time but had turned away from the church and joined the many who bash the church for it's failings. He wants to continue to claim a love for Jesus While at the same time saying that he hates that which Jesus calls into being - hates that which is supposed to be all about Jesus. If you were to go to view that video on U-tube what you might see is that it spawned a whole bunch of spin off videos One called, 'I hate religion and I hate Jesus too'. Another ... 'I hate Jesus and I hate Christians too'. And from there the videos just went down hill to a general hatred of many things and a disbelief in anything that had to do with God. I came away from the whole experience of checking out the U-tube videos deeply distressed.

At the same time, I had to acknowledge that this is the direction that many are going in our world today. Many maintain a deep spirituality but want little or nothing to do with 'religion' or the church. I wondered how it is possible to 'hate' all of the stuff that is about Jesus and yet claim to love Jesus? And as I pondered the question I thought about that great line by the unclean spirit "I know who you are, ..." Do we know who Jesus is? Do we know the power and authority of God? It seems to me that often times the fact is that we don't want to know too much about God. We would rather make God and Jesus in our own image and Jesus can be just what we want Jesus to be without all of the interference of religion. Then we can love the Jesus we have made up without any of the entanglements with the whole history of God and the creation and His fallen creation. Then it can be just me and the Jesus that is easy to love.

It is fascinating to think about our Old Testament text for today in relationship to these things. God is talking to Moses. God has lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and out into the desert wilderness on their way to the promised land. They have gotten an up close and personal view of the power of God and they are afraid. They don't want to ever get that close to God again. God is awesome and powerful beyond their ability to understand or to deal with it. They know that God has rescued them and continually provides for them. But they have also seen that God can demand faithfulness when it comes to what He wants the people to do. And so they ask for God to speak to them through a prophet. And God promises to do just that. God promises to continue to speak and promises to continue to send those who will carry His message to the people. And God reminds the people that there will be those who say that they speak for God but have no idea what God wants the people to hear.

And so we love Jesus as long as Jesus is everything we want Him to be. And we hate the religion that tries to help us understand who God is and what God wants us to hear because too often we come to realize that human beings fail even when they try to understand what God is calling them to do. What a mess, huh?

Did you hear the good news? Even with all of our human brokenness, God continues to come. God continues to speak - God continues to send prophets. And where does Jesus come in the gospel text ... but into the church. There He casts out the unclean spirits and brings freedom and life.

Do you know who Jesus is? He is the Holy One of God. How are we to understand such a thing Gather together and hear what God has to say ... listen as He speaks through His prophets to call broken people to life.

Here the words of the Psalmist:

¹Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

²Great are your works, O LORD, pondered by all who delight in them.

AMEN