

***Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary***  
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for January 28, 2018  
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost



**THE READINGS**

**First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. <sup>16</sup>This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.”

<sup>17</sup>Then the LORD replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. <sup>20</sup>But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak – that prophet shall die.”

*Worth Noting: God appointed the ancient prophets – Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the rest – in the line established in Deuteronomy 18:15. As the voice of God to the people, they called the people to their covenant obligations. Christians proclaim Jesus Christ in the same line, calling all, Jews and Gentiles, to be faithful. Who among your acquaintances serves this function, holding you accountable to the will and values of God?*

**Psalm 111**

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

<sup>2</sup>Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

<sup>3</sup>Full of honor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

<sup>4</sup>He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

<sup>5</sup>He provides food for those who fear him;  
he is ever mindful of his covenant.

- <sup>6</sup> He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
- <sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy.
- <sup>8</sup> They are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
- <sup>9</sup> He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.  
Holy and awesome is his name.
- <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever.

*Worth Noting: Psalm 111 provides a synopsis of the basis for the covenant relationship between the LORD and Israel: the mighty deeds and continuing righteousness of the LORD met by the peoples' response of their whole mind and will (in Hebrew, the heart). How does your community respond to God's mighty deeds? Perhaps first: What are the mighty deeds God has done for your community (not just personally)?*

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; <sup>3</sup> but anyone who loves God is known by him. <sup>4</sup> Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup> Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords – <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

<sup>7</sup> It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup> “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup> But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. <sup>12</sup> But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

*Worth Noting: “You’re right: idols are nonexistent; and yes, you are right: eating meat sacrificed to idols is to eat meat sacrificed to nothing. Your knowledge is complete, but not your love.” Do you have to hold your tongue sometimes, leaving someone with imperfect knowledge uncorrected in order to maintain a relationship? Has that happened to you? Do you know “ignorant people” who have great love?*

## **Gospel: Mark 1:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

<sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

<sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”

<sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

<sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

*Worth Noting: The unclean spirits wish to exercise the power their knowledge of Jesus' identity gives (a knowledge not shared with the humans) for their benefit and not the benefit of Jesus or the community. Thus is knowledge power as in 1 Corinthians.*

## **CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES**

### **Entering into the Scriptures**

In times past, the Gospel of Mark was considered a crude synopsis of the Gospel of Matthew. In recent times, however, readers have acknowledged Mark's creative genius. In Mark 1:21-28, for instance, the author gives the listener/reader a brief summary and foreshadowing of the whole of the Gospel, with a portrait of a typical day for Jesus and introduction of key characters who will reappear throughout the Gospel.

Jesus teaches, and when onlookers compare him favorably with the scribes, the listener/reader has a premonition of the conflict with authorities that will eventually dominate the Gospel. Jesus casts out an “unclean spirit,” previewing both his ministry, the ministry of his apostles (Mark 6:7-13), and the ministry of those who cast out demons in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38 and Christ followers hearing the story).

Demons commonly confront Jesus throughout his ministry as they recognize immediately what no humans do: Jesus is “the Holy One of God.” When the demons try to cry out in witness to him, Jesus silences them, and so Mark introduces the Messianic Secret. Right up to his trial by the Jerusalem authorities, Jesus keeps from the general public confirmation of his status as “the Holy One of God.” (The Twelve receive this teaching but are “sternly warned” not to tell anyone else [Mark 8:27-30].)

At the end, the tales of Jesus' power spread quickly throughout the region. The listener wonders: Will this popularity save him from the wrath of the authorities? The tension builds.

### **“Getting to Know You”**

Politicians and school administrators argue for public funding of education because “we are in a global economy and need an educated workforce to compete.” Education becomes a search for knowledge in order to exercise power. The readings from 1 Corinthians and Mark contain more than a hint of this utilitarian approach to knowledge. In

1 Corinthians, Paul warns his audience against equating “knowledge” with giving free rein to act toward others without regard to their situation. Paul emphasizes that love takes precedence over knowledge.

In the selection from Mark, the demons, in an effort to forestall being cast out, tell Jesus they know his identity that he has revealed to no one, the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). In both cases, some try to exercise knowledge to convey power over another.

There is another kind of Biblical knowledge, expressing knowing and loving another deeply and intimately – communing between two people. It is the knowledge epitomized in Jesus’ knowledge of the Church (Ephesians 5). It is a knowledge of and love for the deepest identity of each other, as children of God, made in God’s image. True education, the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, becomes an exploration into the profound mystery of ourselves and others, not for the purpose of manipulation but in a communion of love for the subject.

### Questions for Discussion

When have you been a prophet for another? When does your community act as a prophet to the wider world?

Have you ever written your autobiography? How would you summarize your current life in (say) 200 words? Has that changed over the last decade?

Lovers wish us well and “demons” ill. Both observe us closely and know well our habits and foibles. How do you suppose they would summarize your typical day?

We often think of the reason for public education to be the development of an educated, economically productive workforce. How else do we benefit from a vibrant system of public education?



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*Unless expressly stated otherwise, all quotations from Scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*

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