

## **Sermons for the Journey**

The Rev. John Morrison

Epiphany 4 – Year B

Sunday, January 28, 2018

“Heed the authority of Jesus; respond to his call”

Some years ago on a Sunday morning, the Prospect Street Band was warming up for the 10:00 o'clock service. Occasionally they would sing Robin Marks's "Revival" and I would hear them in the sacristy and come out to listen. Often I would focus on Rob Wheeler as he sang, "I hear the voice of one calling, prepare ye the way of the Lord." And then other voices would join and remind one that God was sending a revival to "bring [us] all back home." There was more, much more, but whenever I listened to that song at Saint John's or on a CD, I wondered how open I was to the possibility that God was calling me to be that someone I was created to be, or whether I merely liked the rhythmic cadences of the music and refused to allow the truth of the words to sink in. I had to ask myself whether it is possible that prophets exist other than those mentioned in the scriptures, those who answered a call by exercising their unique gifts in order to call others, those who helped to open your ears and mine to God's calling, our eyes to God's presence, our hearts to God's love? I think that the answer is obvious.

Now segue to today's Old Testament lesson. God raises up a prophet in Moses, a prophet who will speak to the people in God's name, and he attaches to that message a warning: "Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable." What is embedded in this warning is that Israel is a "stiff-necked people" bound together by all sorts of rules, but too often unwilling to be obedient as Abraham was obedient, as the long line of prophets who succeeded him were obedient. The kicker is that God will raise up a prophet like Moses, that he will put his words in the prophet's mouth, that the prophet will speak every word that God commands. Guess who the prophet is. The important thing is that each of us heeds the words of the prophet, comes to grips with and attends to the call of God in Christ Jesus, that you and I see ourselves as uniquely equipped to fill a place in God's good creation and then do so in order that "everything we are, everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as response to his summons and service" (Os Guinness, *The Call*).

As far as the words of the prophet are concerned for us this morning, the key is that the words spoken to us, the words proclaimed in the lessons don't become merely "words, words, words" but are etched in our hearts so that you and I can respond to and then live up to our calling, so that "whatever the word of God is that was spoken to us in the past not be relegated to the past, treated merely as just words; it must remain the word of God" (Michael Ward). What Moses does is act on his call from God; so also do

the prophets. The word of the Lord was proclaimed again and again, but all too often Israel failed to act, did instead “what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Similarly, every week after reading the lessons, the lector says, “The word of the Lord” and you and I respond “Thanks be to God”--perhaps all too often refusing to act on what was proclaimed, perhaps my response more akin to “Thanks be to God that’s ended.” Maybe we are like Eliza Doolittle in “My Fair Lady,” not wanting “words, words, words”, demanding instead “Show me now!”; perhaps she, perhaps you and I, without knowing it, demand not just something other than words but the Word himself. And so Jesus, the word spoken to Moses and all the other prophets of Israel becomes flesh, comes among us, “full of grace and truth,” “God incarnate, man divine.”

God comes in the flesh and, as we heard last week, says simply “Follow me.” The response to those called is immediate; the invitation functions as an imperative and there is no hesitation. There is something about Jesus; his call is radical; no less so is the response of those summoned. But what about you and me? What is your response, my response? Is there any urgency? Today you and I hear that Jesus taught as one having authority and so I looked up that word. Authority carries the weight of without possible contradiction, of you must hear and accept what I have to say. But why? I want to know. And the answer is simple, “Because I’m telling you the truth.” In Jesus, God speaks to you and me in his own voice and on his own authority. He is the one Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18.

How often Jesus says “Truly, truly” or “Verily, verily, you have heard it said, but I...” The claims of Jesus Christ confront and demand a response. Kent Hughes suggests that my life, your life, can become very much like that of a train conductor who, after years and years of calling out “Babylon, Lindenhurst, Copiague, Amityville” until he arrives at “Penn Station, last stop,” begins to believe that he has been to all the towns when, in reality he has never gotten off at any stop other than his own. You and I run the risk of hearing the Holy Scriptures, of encountering Jesus, and refusing to be bitten by their or his reality. Someone once remarked that “too long a sacrifice makes a stone of the heart.” You’ll have to wrestle with that one. No time or room here. However, it could also be said that if you and I listen long enough and fail to respond that moment will arrive when we can no longer respond, when we will be unable to see the truth and grasp it.

It is reported that Archimedes said that if you provided him with a lever he could lift the world. That claim provoked the following observation from Os Guinness who defines the call of God as “the Archimedean point by which faith moves the world. That is why calling is the most comprehensive reorientation and the profound motivation in human experience—the ultimate Why for living in all history.” Listen to Jesus who speaks with authority; don’t look for some higher authority; answer the call of Jesus and you and I will find our disordered lives coming back together. Heed the authority of Jesus; respond to his call. **Amen.**