

Epiphany 4, Yr B; January 29, 2006/South: Deut. 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; mark 1:21-28

This week as I sat and pondered the goodness of God I thought, what would teaching without authority be like? If Jesus astounded those in the synagogue by his teaching with authority, what kind of teaching were they accustomed to? I guess that is a logical question. As I think about the years of education I have experienced I can think of those instructors who taught with an air of pressure, sort of do this or fail. And I can think of those who really taught me something and they did not teach with fear, they taught from their heart; it wasn't teaching only from the text books they had studied and for which they had become experts. I learned from them, not because I perceived their authority, but because I could tell they cared about me. They wanted me to learn.

As I picture the scribes expounding on the Scriptures to the crowds in the Synagogue I can hear them quoting the experts from whom they had studied. They were gifted and educated and performed their tasks with great expertise I am sure. But there is nothing like a teacher who is able to rise above the expectations of the system to reach deep within the person and help them to see what they have within them. I have also found there is nothing as profound as having someone recognize what God has given and being

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able to help the one with whom it resides to recognize it as well. There is a change that takes place that is one of the most life giving experiences you might ever encounter.

The scribes were able to quote what they had learned but evidently they were not able to speak as someone who was teaching for purposes other than to instruct for extrinsic rules, laws and regulating behavior. They were likely experts on things not of the heart, but that was not enough to really allow the hearers to learn about the heart of God and God's love. This was likely true because they were unable to teach something they didn't know. They had not been open to anything other than the tradition they had known. They had not been open to experiencing God until Jesus arrived.

When Jesus entered the synagogue after he had called his disciples and began to teach, the hearers recognized immediately the difference in how Jesus taught. Jesus taught, in their words, 'with authority'. In this I believe they meant he spoke with conviction, he spoke as if he knew what he was talking about because it was something he had experienced. Jesus could teach with authority, not only because he was the 'Son of God' but because he knew first hand the love of God.

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The following story says it so well:

‘The Master was never impressed by diplomas or degrees. He scrutinized the person, not the certificate.

He was once heard to say, “When you have ears to hear a bird in song, you don’t need to look at its credentials.”

Just as the song of the bird stands on its own, so does the testimony of our experiences of God. I want to make myself perfectly clear, to experience God you don’t need to have a mountain top experience. To experience God we only need to be open to what it is God may have for us. We must also understand that God is in the ordinary. When we experience God it may be because we have recognized the beauty in creation and have pondered the great detail with which God has made this beautiful earth. It may be that we see the presence of God in the faces of our children and grandchildren or the face of a friend or neighbor; it maybe that we see God in the healing of our hurts.

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It maybe that we experience God because we have had a teacher who also spoke with authority or authenticity; and helped us to see the best in ourselves, the God spirit within us.

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth who need encouragement too. They are worried about doing things right. More importantly they have gotten off their spiritual journey long enough to notice that someone else isn't doing it right. They have consumed themselves with a legalistic point of view and they appear to have been worried that if people don't follow all of the levitical code the standing of the community in the eyes of their religion might be in jeopardy. Paul says it very simple, 'knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.'

You may have heard me say before that we know when something is from God if it is loving or if it is life-giving. Paul is essentially saying the same thing. Just because we have knowledge we might be able to know right from wrong in matters of law and regulation, but unless we know love we will be unable to know our value or the value of

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others. We need to know our value, not because God needs us to, but because God desires for us to know beyond a doubt whose we are; and when we know in our hearts whose we are and we know God is not a God of wrath, but a God of love and concern we then find it difficult to believe we can build ourselves up with externals only. God works within our hearts and helps us to understand how expounding our credentials may make people respect us for our education or our knowledge, but what makes us children of God is how much we love. You see there is an amazing fact; in the eyes of God it doesn't matter if we are the most successful, richest person in the world or if we are a homeless person on the street God loves us all the same. For some that is a hard pill to swallow. We get all caught up in status by the worlds measuring stick, when all we need to be concerned with is our experience with God.

I am going to challenge you all this week to think about what it is that might be getting in your way of your experience with God, no matter what that might be, pray God will allow the scales to fall off your eyes and help you to name the evil that crouches at your door threatening to distract you from God. You see once we name it and acknowledge it we then can begin to address how it interferes with our spiritual journey. I once found a

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person with whom I struggled greatly and I knew it was not fair for me to ask God to change the person, even though at the time I was certain it was he who need to be changed, so I asked God to change my heart and allow me to see what I could love in this person. God is faithful and once I recognized it was my issue God then could change my heart. God wants to help you change yours too.

Jesus is the teacher who teaches with a passion that demonstrates whose we are and Jesus wants us to be that teacher to others as well. We don't need a theological education, just an open heart.

Amen

Mother Sue+