

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations... (Peace of drawing close to you)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock redeemer and Renewer of us all. Amen.

Good MORNING! Peace be with you!

How is it with your soul? I PRAY it is well, as is mine.

We have been discussing that we are 'Becoming People of God' as God calls and we respond. Each time we respond to God's call, we are living out our covenant of faith and our identity as a disciple/follower of Jesus. When we respond to the call, We embody God's love for the world as we meet the needs of the world and love is poured out. Last week we learned that God keeps calling again and again. God doesn't give up on us, not on you not on me.

So a quick check-in: pause and reflect...

What call did God place on you this week? How did you respond?

Let us pray...

Today the first reading offers 2 promises from God, 1) A prophet will arise from the community who will speak the word of God, and 2) the prophet will be held accountable.

What may not be clear is who the current prophet is that is speaking and what's going on in the moment (the context).

Anyone want to guess??? MOSES is the present prophet, the instrument of God. Within the book of Deuteronomy, God promises to provide the next prophet, and also provides laws, privileges, commandments, regulations, and prescriptions for the good of the community as they prepare to cross over into the Promised Land.

Perhaps you are wondering what this has to do with discernment which Antuan spoke about in the welcome. Well, when we discern the movement of God in our lives, we are continuing the call-and-response between us and God. We depend on (TRUST in) God's grace and guidance to show us where to go, what to do, and who to be. We practice discernment by noticing the places God is at work among us.

Discernment is one of the many tasks and opportunities before the community who are becoming the people of God. As we meet together for worship and fellowship and for learning, we are also listening for the call of God who will be working within certain individuals to cultivate gifts and inclinations that will lead to certain roles within the life of the church.

When we do this, we come to expect that God does raise up from among us those with the gifts, skills, and assets our community needs to become a place where God’s love reigns.

We know from Jesus’ own experience that taking a leadership role while among the people who know you best can be difficult. Side comments of “Who does he think he is” would ring out or be whispered in small groups of the disgruntled. Glaring looks might be given to the one who dares to step up to leadership. Snorts of derision and “anyone but her” might be mumbled here and there. At least that is what we fear would happen if we dared to respond to the call that is rising within us.

The community of faith can be a supportive incubator for those who discern a call to leadership or ministry of various kinds. Even more, the community can be the means through which some individuals can begin to understand that God is at work within them. When we hear affirmation for speaking out or taking leadership, when we are given encouragement for our attitudes or empathy, when voices tell us that we are good at that or we see your heart in this, we feel a call from God being confirmed in the life of the congregation. God says, “I will raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people;” this is how it happens in the life of the church.

When one of our own stands up to lead or proclaim or to follow a call to ministry, we feel pride and connection – as if all of us have been called to cultivate and train this new leader.

I’m one of those persons who has been shaped, guided, nurtured and loved into serving. It is the work of the people of God to cultivate God’s call from within.

There are struggles in both discerning and following that call. The Deuteronomy text warns of this. The message you proclaim needs to be the one that gives life and not death. It needs to represent the God we’ve come to know in Jesus. Sadly, sometimes those in leadership positions cause damage with this power and place in the life of the community. Sometimes a leader might speak of another god – like a god of power or wealth, the god of ego or lust –to advance that leader’s own ends. We see it happen all

too frequently. And death and destruction are often the result—sometimes after considerable damage is done to the people of God.

The Gospel text presents the first of many challenges to Jesus’ ministry: “What have you to do with us, Jesus?” That question is often behind the reluctance of a community to follow the authority of the Christ who calls us to make disciples or do a new thing.

Notice that the narrative begins with amazement about the authority of the teaching of Jesus. “It’s not like the scribes,” the people note. It’s not simply repeating the tradition of the people of God and various teachers throughout history.

There is something new, something immediate. It is a now moment, a responsive moment that Jesus presents. And then Jesus shows them what he means by healing the man who challenges him, the man with an unclean spirit.

We give the title “demonic” to an incomprehensible evil. Sometimes it is used to avoid responsibility; that is why many of us are reluctant to use a word like “demonic” when speaking of human actions. But it also reminds us that there are “powers and principalities” that are beyond our understanding.

We do ourselves a disservice when we dismiss the power of the demonic, especially when we sensationalize and characterize it the way it is characterized in pop culture and in movies like the Exorcist. We can also overdo it when we characterize diagnosable mental illness as demon possession, potentially stigmatizing people who are truly suffering.

In history we saw the demonic at work in lynchings and cross burnings, puritan witch hunts, Spanish inquisitions, and the Crusades. Today we can see it in the rage and toxicity of politics and in how easily all of us can fall prey to apathy toward human suffering as we numb ourselves with intoxicating substances, media and behaviors.

The demonic isn't some kind of obvious horned creature. Rather, the demonic deals death and destruction, fertilizes rage, and fosters hatred. It converts fear into violence. The demonic deceives us into believing that vengeance is justice. These are the evil spirits Jesus was casting out in his ministry in Galilee.

In recent times, some would say the demonic at work in the church in America has built strong boundaries that are killing it. We have created arbitrary boundaries about who is

in and who is out rather than being guided by a faithful and ethical living out of our faith. Creating boundaries that demonize certain people creates opportunity for the demonic to poison our witness to the world, and our ability to be in beloved community with one another.

One of the questions in the baptism ritual asks parents and sponsors, and the candidates for baptism when they are able to answer for themselves, "*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*" It is a part of the nature of our faith that we stand against the demonic both in our society and in ourselves.

Sometimes our call is to silence the demonic voices. The best way to do that is to present a better narrative. We are to tell a better story about how the world can work in God's kingdom, how the church can represent a better way of being the kingdom of God. Sometimes shouting and pointing fingers just raises everyone's blood pressure. It would be better to bring healing to a broken world with kindness and gentleness. It's not avoiding confrontation with evil but refusing to play the same games. We do so by standing in the authority of Jesus.

Like the prophet who comes from within the people of God, sometimes the demonic does as well. **One of them is a limitation we place on our own capacity to believe in the mysterious and miraculous.** The people who witnessed Jesus' casting out of the unclean spirit were "amazed," completely surprised that someone had the authority to do this--especially someone like Jesus. Frankly, we need to ask ourselves:

- How often do we limit the capacity of our church to amaze the community?
- What is something that has amazed you about your faith or church recently?
- What words do you believe true prophets are speaking today?
- What boundaries do you believe are restricting the vitality and witness of Christianity?

Remember, Listening and action feed each other as grace forms us into the people of God. We don't give up on one another and on the community around us. We are in the business of making disciples who make disciples.

So whether the need is for prayer, or food, or presence, you are living out the mission and ministry of loving God and God's people. You proclaim your faith and your disciple-ness as you embody the servanthood and God's love for the world.

'Take heart, you are not alone' is the message you send when you respond with hands and feet and heart. Let us also keep inviting others to come & see so that they will meet the God we serve and be positioned to hear the good news.

Let's pray.... (on screen)

Response to the Word

ALL: Fount of wisdom and life, Holy One of God, your teachings are trustworthy and true. They are the beginning of wisdom in our lives.

May they also be the beginning of peace and hope in our world.

May the divine commands that lit the sky with light, be the commands that light our lives with your healing power.

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Everything.

Grant your healing power in the hurting and hopeful places of our lives.

Amen.

May it be so...so be it. Amen.