

Deuteronomy 18

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet[d] like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. **16** 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.” **17** Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. **18** 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. **19** Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. **20** 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.”

Psalm 11

1 Praise the Lord!

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

2 Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who delight in them.

3 Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.

4 He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the Lord is gracious and merciful.

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

6 He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.

7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.

8 They are established forever and ever,

to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

9 He sent redemption to his people;

he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is his name.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;

all those who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever.

Mark 1

21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. **22** They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. **23** Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, **24** 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.” **25** But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” **26** And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. **27** 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.” **28** At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Sermon

Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

Lord, open our hearts, and our lives will sing out your name: Amen.

What a blessing it is to be here with you - the students, faculty, and staff of Trinity Lutheran Seminary - to serve as your

University Pastor, to work with the worship committee, to explore what it is to be God's church, and helping to form leaders for Christ's church actively at work in the world.

First, this morning, I need to clarify something. The Chimes, our university's student newspaper, interviewed me before I arrived on campus. While largely accurate, a couple of lines need explained to this community. "After that, while in middle school, Tucker sat in on a class at our own Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and it *scared the crap* out of him. For a while, he said, he rejected the idea of becoming a pastor due to that experience." That's entirely true, but some of you have heard that as a critique of Trinity. For that impression, I apologize! That was not at all what I intended to communicate. What I tried to convey to the reporter, what jarred my pubescent mental state, was sitting as a middle schooler in a class full of adults, some fresh out of college and others in their thirties, forties, and fifties, as though they were my peers. To my

thirteen year old self, this seemed patently absurd. It wasn't the fault of Trinity, or those students or professor, or even my pastor at the time, though I love to remind Pastor Jordan of how silly it seemed. Rather, it was this anxiety inducing mixup of a kid considering the depth of being a pastor. Doogie Howser I was not. It was an occasion of somethings that did not fit together, that did not belong together, at least not yet. I wasn't ready to consider that God might be calling me into ministry, into a new future, into a new partnership with the church, and what scared the crap out of me was that I felt that call here, lo those many years ago. That was an Epiphany moment in my life. God revealed something true, something beautiful, something I needed to know. But that doesn't mean I was ready for it. It was an uncommon experience for someone of my age to have. Inside myself, I wasn't ready to respond to it.

In these weeks after Epiphany, we see ripples of revelation that revealed Christ to the world. The waves of that revelation reshape the shorelines, the very landscape, of creation. Since the Epiphany festival, where Jesus's encounter with the Magi vicariously represented the Creator's re-introduction to the fullness of humanity, we've seen some things. *We've seen things, man.* We've seen Jesus dunked in the Jordan by a extreme revolutionary who lived in the wilderness, critiqued society, wore odd and uncomfortable clothes. Sure, this fella's a prophet. He definitely doesn't sound like a fanatic...except, of course, John the Baptist is almost immediately arrested. He certainly didn't seem safe to the State. We've seen some things. John was an epiphany to Rome of the radical power of God to challenge the corruption of temporal authorities, which is truly good news, but news they wanted to snuff out. Not a helpful or faithful response to the work of God. After his radicalization, Jesus then enters the wilderness

himself to be tested by none other than Satan. The Devil, personified? We've seen some things. Jesus hears of John's arrest, then returns to the public eye and declares nothing less than a new kingdom that will supplant Rome's priority. Last week, Jesus convinces some fishermen, Simon and Andrew, James and John, to leave their respectable if not lucrative jobs and instead rely upon the charity, the handouts, the welfare of other people. A growing willingness among common people to lead uncommon lives for this uncommon Lord? We've seen some things, and it's only a few weeks after Epiphany. How do we respond when we encounter God in these uncommon places?

Today, we see someone respond to Jesus: a man, or more accurately, some someone's, the demons that possess this person. How do these demons, this legion of fallen angels, respond to God? They're the first to name Jesus as God's chosen, the Messiah, the Holy One of God. In some sense, that's the right

response. But they're not there to welcome the reign of God. They're afraid of Jesus, of the new world order he brings, for they're not willing to give up their power. Indeed, they wouldn't have to be cast out if they weren't focused on their own power, their own possessions, their own authority over this person who they have enslaved. They see Jesus for who he is, the Holy One of God, but they do not welcome God's presence. Indeed, they convulse at God's Word, cry out with a last-gasp effort to drown out God's voice. At the presence of God, they respond with the right words, and yet don't respond rightly at all. That, too, is possible for us: responding with the right words, but not responding rightly.

More to the point, they're not just responding to Jesus's presence. They're responding to Jesus's authority, Jesus's *exousia*. **ex-oo-see-a**. Although, whenever I see it, it first comes to mind as **ex-ooz-ya**. Actually, that kind of fits, because the response

of the demons to Jesus's authority, and really, much of our personal response, is "**excuse ya.**" As in, excuse ya Jesus, I think you're overstepping your bounds. Jesus, we know you're the holy one of God, but we'd really rather you operate in some other way. We'd really rather control our own fiefdoms. Determine our own outcomes. Exercise our own demons.

Yet that, of course, is the deception of sin so prevalent in our lives. We know all too well that, when we exercise sole authority over our own lives, or even worse, impose our will demonically over the lives of unwilling others, we snuff out life rather than let it shine. When we try to determine our own outcomes, we do it to our own detriment. We cannot exercise our own demons because we've too often made a deal with the devil in the hopes of getting ahead. Excuse ya, Jesus, we like the idol of control, even when we drive ourselves to the grave.

Of course, some others respond to Jesus's authority in this pericope as well: an infamous "they." This surely included those first disciples Jesus called - Andrew and Simon Peter, John and James - as well as whoever was in the synagogue at Capernaum, who happened to bear witness the extent of Jesus's authority. They respond not by fearing their loss of control, but instead by sharing the good news of Jesus's authority, of the potential of a kingdom ruled by the Lamb of God, a country guided by the Good Shepherd. We need not respond like a middle school Drew, afraid of losing control of his future. We need not respond like the demons, afraid to lose their unholy influence over an innocent person. We might instead embrace the wonder of an unknown future pollinated by the presence of this Prince of Peace.

The demonic response was inward fear of losing personal authority. The disciples response was the outward joy of sharing Christ's authority, which comes from outside themselves. Let's be

careful here, because on this first day of classes of the Spring semester, in this first month of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, we're still learning how God's presence is at work in this new paradigm. We're still discerning where God's at and what God's up to. With that environment, with those experiences in the water we drink, it might be easy for you to hear me saying, as a Capital hire preaching his first sermon at Trinity, that we just need to respond happily to that situation and unreflectively tell good stories. **I'm not doing that.** That's certainly not what I intend to say, nor is it faithful to the text or our situation.

Rather, that work of discerning where God's active, and how God's active, is work that we all need to do. Students, faculty, and staff. New to campus and longtime residents here at the corner of College and Main. We all, each of us, come face to face with God's presence and the stark realization that the beginning of the reign of God is the end of the reign of me. How we respond to that - as

people, as churches, as institutions - is the stuff of discipleship. Submitting our personal authority to the cosmic authority of Christ. It's holy work that requires prayer, critical engagement, and a shared commitment that our thriving is always intertwined with the thriving of others, that our abundant life is dependent on God's abundant life and the abundant of those around us. God's *exuosia* excuses our failures, forgives our sins, and prepares us to respond with hopefulness, not for the world that we've built, but for the new creation that God is building. Our responsibility is not in building the world, but instead, in response to the Builder, telling the story of the goodness that we've seen, of the potential goodness of a world out of our control. We respond by inviting others into the liberating, life-giving authority that we've experienced at the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. In this new day for Trinity Lutheran Seminary, now at Capital University, that 2,000 year old response is still the same. To us, Jesus says, "Excuse ya, but I think you're

bearing a burden of authority, of responsibility, of guilt that you just don't need. I'll cast out all the evil that possess you and open a door for brand new life." May we respond with nothing other than the wonder of the disciples, telling others to come and see what God has done. Thanks be to God. Amen.