

## Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

January 29, 2012

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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.”

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.

### **“Destination: Freedom!”**

**Where are we going? Just where are we going? In this GPS world where we have a GPS device in the car, on the phone, on the ipad, and everywhere it still is a worthy question: Where are we going?**

**I may not know where we are going, but I do know this: We are continually on the go! We are on the go more waking hours than any generation in any era in time. We are in constant motion. In the course of**

**a day most of us travel many miles. In the course of a month most of us travel more miles than just a few generations back did in an entire year.**

**We are on the go, so much so that we have our calendars published and when we want to have an opportunity to be with friends we have to talk about not what day of the week might work, but what month there may be an open opportunity. We are on the go.**

**Where does all the on the go get us? It gets us to destination what?**

**Culturally the destination usually leads to more being on the go. Culturally the destination leads to the place of being “happy.” And yet, “happy” is in reality a temporary. If the goal is “happy” just ask any frequent flyer or frequent buyer how that is working out. The reality is that happy lasts only as long as the party. Vacations end, luxury items lose their lux, and someone will always be pointing us towards the nicer, bigger, better, more improved, stronger want that is necessary for “happiness” and that you do not have.**

**Happy is a cultural destination. Faith has a role in showing us where to go. It points us beyond happy to a deeper kind of reality. Faith points us to a destination where it is more about joy, and meaning, and love, and relationship, and freedom.**

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**It is why the question is a faith question. Just where are we going? Where are you going? Where is this all leading you? It is in our life in Christ that we discover there is something deeper and wider than being “happy.” In Christ there is meaning. In Christ there is joy. In Christ there is love. In Christ there is relationship. In Christ there is freedom.**

**See in Christ there is this destination that we don't have to be constantly on the high of happiness. We can be on the road where there is**

**the reality that most of life is lived more in the tough stuff and the daily mix of getting through—that in that journey and by being in this relationship in Christ we will along the route have this deep set joy of knowing we are God’s own.**

**There is this joy of knowing that no matter what happens we are claimed by Christ and with him, in him, held by God as God’s own. Meaning, real meaning in life, happens not as get stuff but as we gain perspective on how we are fitting into God’s plan for our living and our life. And when we live into that there is this freedom of being able to trust God to carry us through all that we encounter.**

**It is such freedom—freedom of knowing God is at work in us and in our world and with those which we love that is the destination of this faith of ours.**

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**The struggle comes in the reality that most of our time is not spent in enjoying such freedom but living this panic that we are on our own and we have to control what comes next. We limit the scope of God’s grace to our view of how the world works, and we bind ourselves to an idolatry of the self that keeps us on the treadmill of the world where we are going, going, going but not reaching any destination.**

**Jesus calls us out of that treadmill of going, going, going and having to be constantly on the go looking for the next. Jesus calls us out of that and to this joy, relationship, meaning, love, and freedom. It is a freedom from the power of struggles and endlessly getting no where. It is a freedom from the power of struggle—not a liberation of it but a freedom from its power over our life.**

**There will be struggling, for everyone, yes everyone will struggle. That is the stuff of this world. But it does not have to be the power in our life. The power in our life comes from God. God is the destination.**

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**How do we get there? We go to scripture.**

**What does it say? It says, in Mark 1:21, “They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. When Jesus saw that there was a man with an unclean spirit...Jesus rebuked him saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’”**

**Here is the pattern of this freedom in Christ. Here is the destination...it is here in these few verses of Mark. It is a three-fold pattern. He goes into the synagogue. He teaches. He deals with the tough stuff.**

**That is the road map. That is the way. That is the pattern that takes us to the destination. It is what Jesus does. He worships. He teaches. He deals with the tough stuff.**

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**He worships.**

**What is the commandment? “Worship the Lord your God.” Worship is the place where we make that connection with the Holy. Worship is the place where God calls us to be. Yes, here in church where we have a worship service, but also in life—worship is the place where God commands us to be.**

**What happens in worship? It is in worship that we ponder the reality of who God is and who we are. It is in worship that we ponder the reality that God is God and we are not. And we need that again and again and**

again because we are prone to put ourselves in the position of thinking that we are more God than God is.

God and God's commandment to love is to direct our way and our path and our life. We are not to be in the driver's seat, God is. It is in our moments of worship, in our worship services, and in our living the command to worship that we get such real perspective that God is God and we are not.

Worship is about acknowledging God's goodness. It is about acknowledging that we understand who God is and it is about gratitude. Worship is about our being thankful for all we have been given and those blessings which come our way. It is about singing before the Creator the truth that we grasp God's goodness and blessing to us.

Jesus goes to the synagogue. He worships. Our lives are to have this rhythm of worship about them. Each day and each week we are to worship. It is a commandment and not an option for when we have nothing else on the calendar.

Worship sets our perspective. Worship sets us on the road. Worship positions us—even globally where we belong.

You can worship in a grand service. You can worship in a breath prayer. You can worship while you do the dishes or ride the elevator. Worship can be as grand as a prayer that says "thank you God" or as broad as beholding the skies and taking in a breath of the awesomeness of God.

**Worship. Worship. Worship.**

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**He teaches.**

**He enters the synagogue—he worships—and he teaches. He teaches. Not only does he teach but he teaches as one who has authority. I've always been intrigued by that view. That he taught as one who has authority.**

**There were in the 1<sup>st</sup> century these different scribal schools of thought. And apparently when one went to the synagogue one could recognize in what the person said which school of thought that teacher belonged to. The sorts of things they said showed that teacher's leaning in one direction or another.**

**It might be sort of like the way you can tell if the preacher when to Princeton or went to some other school. You can tell the difference between us Princeton preachers and the um....well I don't want to dis any other school. Regardless, Jesus didn't appear to have a slant as much as he had authority.**

**Don't credit that authority to any magic from on high. Credit that authority to his having so inculcated that Word of God into his life that when he spoke there was a kind of authority there which demonstrated this truly authentic life. It is that authentic part which is at the heart of the nature of authority.**

**See sisters and brothers, here is the deal. Your life and my life, our lives they teach. Our lives and our living—it teaches. There is no avoiding that. Our lives teach. But the question is what our life teaches.**

**When we live our life in the Word of God our lives teach that. When we live our life in this vital and living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that is what our lives will teach. When live our life as if there is nothing that matters but me, me, me and what I want, oh—then our lives will teach that.**

**Our lives teach. And the calling is to be productive, able, good, apt teachers. And to do that we have to master the material. In order to teach something you have to know it. The truth of the matter is that if we are too teach something the one who learns the most is the one who teaches it. And so in our teaching life we become the primary learners.**

**We are to learn by studying scripture, by meditating on God's Word, and by growing this relationship with Christ. An hour a week, or a few hours a month will not do that. It needs to be a daily practice. Spending time in the Word of God is the place where you will find not only the road map and the destination, but it is the place where you will encounter this God of Creation right in the middle of where you are.**

**You teach. What is your life teaching? What authority do others see and experience in you.**

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**He deals with the tough stuff.**

**That is Jesus there that day in the synagogue. He worships. He teaches. He deals with the tough stuff.**

**Look at the scene. A nice quiet little worship service. Indeed, but not for long. There is one calling out right as Jesus is speaking. Oh, Jesus, I feel your pain here! But what does Jesus do? Does he shush the man, does he brush it aside, does he move away from the man? No, Jesus deals with the tough stuff.**

**He confronts the man. And Jesus sees that the man has an unclean spirit about him and he commands that spirit to leave the man. Now this is nothing so out of the ordinary of where we live and move today that it should seem remote.**

**There is unclean stuff in all of us. There are these unclean things—these unhelpful spirits in us that serve only to separate us from being the people God wants us to be. And we can use some of the power of Jesus calling those out of us.**

**Jesus tackles the tough stuff there in the synagogue that day and on every page of the gospel story. Ours is the task. We are to deal with our tough stuff in life. Sweeping it under the rug is not an option. Ignoring it will not work. Thinking that our struggles and difficulties do not matter because no one sees it—oh, that is a sham.**

**We are called to take on the tough stuff in our lives—confront it. We are called to bring it to the light of our encounter with the Word and our worship of the Creating God. And as we do that—we will discover that God will make a way. God always makes a way.**

**God has a destination for us. God has a way through.**

**That way through is a way of love. That way through is a way of joy. That way through is a way which is life in Christ. And that way through is a destination which is freedom from that which holds us because it is never the stuff that holds us it is God.**

**It is never the stuff that holds us. It is God.**

**Amen.**

**It is never the stuff that holds us. It is God.**

**See the destination before you – it is never the stuff that holds us. It is God!**

**God is the freedom! Amen!**