

January 28, 2018 – Deuteronomy 18:15-20 & Mark 1:21-28

When you think of Moses, what do you think of? For me personally, the first thing I think of is the Exodus. Standing before pharaoh with the voice of Charlton Heston. “Let my people go!” Commanding plagues to rain down upon Egypt. Raising his staff at the Red Sea and parting the waters.

Moses was a powerful leader for God's people. He led them out of Egypt. He led them through the wilderness. He led them all the way to the promised land.

But, standing at the borders of the promised land, as he was in our Old Testament Lesson today, Moses doesn't dwell on his leadership. He doesn't dwell on his miracles. No, God led the Israelites. God did the miracles. Moses was merely a prophet.

In today's culture, we don't usually think about a guy like Moses as a prophet because we often have a warped idea about what a prophet is. So many of those who claim to be prophets today are little more than fortune tellers. Prophecy has been defined as predicting the future. Moses never does that.

No, Moses was a prophet in the true, Biblical sense of the word. He delivered a message from God. That's what a prophet really is. And by that definition, Moses was definitely a prophet. He was, in fact, Israel's first great prophet.

Because his entire life – from the burning bush to the day he dies – is in conversation with God. Hearing God speak and delivering that Word to the people. And probably the most important time that he does that is at Mount Horeb.

The Israelites have just crossed the Red Sea. They don't know where they are going or how they are going to get there. They don't even really know this God who freed them from Egypt. He's been silent for so long.

So God takes them all to Mount Horeb and descends upon the mountain in fire and smoke and earthquakes and the sound of trumpets blasting. And the people are terrified. This is unlike anything they have ever seen from any of the gods of Egypt.

And they tell Moses, “You go up and talk to God. He likes you. We're not going anywhere near him. If we go up there, we'll die.” And God tells told Moses, “Yeah, they're right. You should come alone. You'll be my prophet to them.”

“In fact, you'll be the first of many prophets to my people. Prophets who will speak what I command them. They will have my word in their mouths. And one day, a prophet just like you – a great and powerful prophet – will rise up from among them.”

God's people needed prophets. They needed someone called by God to approach him and hear his word without fear of being destroyed. And they needed someone to deliver his Word of Law and Gospel.

Just like Moses would do on Mount Horeb. Receiving from God those all important Ten Commandments. Pleading with God not to abandon his people after they worship a golden calf. Assuring the Israelites that God would indeed show steadfast love to a thousand generations.

Many prophets after Moses would do the same. Condemning the people for idolatry, corruption, injustice, and sinfulness. Warning them of God's wrath and coming judgment. But also promising to them God's forgiveness and faithfulness and redemption. Even when things looked most hopeless.

God's people depended on his prophets, even when they hated what they had to say. All the way until that day when God went silent once again. When God stopped calling prophets. Stopped sending his Word to his people.

From the prophet Malachi to the time of Jesus, there were no prophets in Israel. We know there were no prophets because there were lots of things written during that time period between the Old and New Testaments. And they all say the same thing: There were no prophets in Israel. For 400 years, God said nothing.

Or, at least, he said nothing new. They still had God's Word. They still had the Law of Moses and the prophets who had come before. And those were good and important. But there was still something missing. They may not have even realized what was missing until they had it back.

Mark writes, *“And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”*

They were astonished because he spoke with authority. They were astonished because he spoke a message from God. For the first time in 400 years, God's Word was in the mouth of a prophet. And it didn't sound like their scribes, who only taught with the authority of those who came before them. No, this had authority, all on its own.

And like that first time that God called Moses to be a prophet at Mount Horeb, it was a little terrifying. Not because there was fire and smoke and earthquakes and trumpet blasts. No, there was nothing quite that dramatic.

There was just one man, who entered the synagogue. And he knew exactly who Jesus was. The rest of the people all looked at Jesus and said, “Oh, he's just Jesus of Nazareth. The son of a carpenter. A local boy.” But the unclean spirit inside this man knew better. This was the Holy One of God. Who had indeed come to destroy the power of the devil.

And when Jesus casts that demon out, it's more than a little frightening. The spirit shrieks and convulses him. And the people look on in amazement. They thought Jesus was a prophet. The first in 400 years. And that was reason for astonishment.

But now they realize, this is something different. This is a new teaching. With even more authority. This is a man who commands obedience even from the powers of hell. This is not just a prophet. This is something even better. This is the Christ. The Savior. The Son of God.

Jesus was something new altogether. Moses was a great prophet. Samuel and Elijah and Isaiah were great prophets. But Jesus was something more. To them and to us.

Because there are more than a few people in this world who would insist that Jesus was just a good teacher, like so many other teachers in this world. That Jesus was just a great prophet, like so many other religious leaders throughout history. That Jesus was just a man. With no more authority than any other man.

And they forget that the Jesus described in the Gospels spoke with authority. Not just the authority of a teacher or a prophet or a man. But with the authority of God himself.

The authority to cast out unclean spirits and condemn the powers of hell. And the authority to forgive sins. And raise the dead. And free those held in Satan's bondage.

Jesus doesn't just teach God's Law and Gospel. He doesn't just deliver God's Law and Gospel as a messenger. He is God's Law and Gospel. He embodies it. He is God's Word made flesh. God's Word of judgment on all those who rebel against God. And God's Word of grace to all those who baptized in his name.

So that when he dies on the cross, he is very last word on how much God loves us. And when he rises from the dead, he is the very last word on the eternal life in store for all who believe in him.

And in this Gospel lesson of one demon possessed man, we see what Jesus does for all of humanity and all of us. For he has silenced the devil. He has cast him out of our lives. And he has freed us from the power of sin, death, and hell. With all the authority of God himself.

Moses promised that God would one day call a prophet like himself. And the people were probably thrilled at the thought. Because... well... Moses was pretty awesome. But what we get is even better. More than a leader. More than a teacher. More than a prophet. We get the Holy One of God. With the authority to save us all. Amen.