

WORSHIP NOTES

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany • January 29, 2012

The Season

The length of the Time after Epiphany is determined by the date of Easter and can be anywhere from four to nine weeks. This year it is seven weeks, and on this fourth Sunday we continue to reflect upon how we have touched by the presence of God made manifest in Jesus Christ. The Spirit descending (Baptism of our Lord); “come and see” (Epiphany 2); “come and follow” (Epiphany 3); the revelation and the invitation continue on this Fourth Sunday as Jesus teaches with authority. Come and be taught . . .

In Word . . .

Our texts today focus on the Word of God, and its power to heal, guide, sustain, and to make new. In our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy, Moses, a messenger of God, shares words of promise and caution to the people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land and begin a new chapter, one in which Moses will not accompany them. Moses assures them that God will raise up prophets to bear God’s word to God’s people. In our Gospel, Jesus is God’s Word, teaching (with authority) and bringing healing (transformation) to a man with an unclean spirit. Our text begins and ends with teaching, while the middle verses contain Jesus’ rebuke of the unclean spirit and an exorcism. The teaching and healing work of Jesus combine to create life change or transformation.

Teachers play important roles in our lives. Most of us are deeply indebted to some caring teacher in our past that challenged, encouraged, and opened new doors for us; and Jesus is a teacher. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is called teacher over and over again, and his first action in Mark’s Gospel, is the act of teaching. Mark doesn’t tell us what Jesus taught; rather he tells us how he taught – with authority, uniquely powerful because it is related to God. The truth that emerges here is that Jesus has power over the destructive forces in our lives as he frees the man and entire community from forces that seek to limit God’s grace and mercy. A teaching with authority, authority larger than our own . . . Perhaps on this Sunday we are challenged to consider what this is, this ‘new’ teaching, and what our lives, this community, and our world might look like if we lived as if Jesus was the primary authority. Come and be taught . . .

And Song . . .

Traditional (9:00)

“Let the Whole Creation Cry” is a hymn that is filled with commitment to praise the Lord. The text is by Stopford Brooke (1832-1916), an Anglican minister and is loosely based on Psalm 148. It was first published in Brooke’s collection *Christian Hymns* (1881) and entitled “Invitation to Praise God.” The tune, SALZBURG, is older than the text, and is attributed to Jakob Hintze (1602-1702), a court musician to the Elector of Brandenburg. The arrangement is a simplified version of a chorale setting by J.S. Bach (1685-1750). Another tune commonly paired with this text is LLANFAIR.

Contemporary (10:30)

The appointed psalm for today is Psalm 111, a teaching psalm that concludes with a verse about finding wisdom, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom . . .” We have substituted one of the Common Psalms for this season, Psalm 95, the *Venite*, an invitation to worship and to listen to God’s word.

“Love Has Come” is from Matt Maher’s debut collection, *The End and the Beginning* (2002). Maher is known for songs that explore the wonders and challenges of the life that God calls us to, and in this song combines his Gospel message with a driving rhythm. One of the most popular and critically acclaimed composers/performers of contemporary Christian music, Maher was recently honored with three Unity Awards (Artist of the Year, Album of the Year, and Song of the Year).