

January 28, 2018
St Luke's
4 Epiphany
Rev Ken Wratten
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm 111
1 Cor 8:1b-13
Mark 1:21-28

I am the oldest of three boys and one girl in my family. That gave me the responsibility to sort of 'lead the way' among my siblings, how to be a good child. One day Fred, my next younger brother and I found a jar of tar in our garage. How cool is that? We thought that was an exciting discovery, and we started talking about what we could do with a jar of tar. We used a stick to spread some tar on the handle grips of our little sister's tricycle. We reasoned that she probably wouldn't notice, and would grab the handles. This was a great idea! So we put some more tar on the seat, and some more on the foot pedals. We were laughing so hard we could hardly stand up. We put the jar back where we found it, and went into the house. I used the kitchen sink to wash my hands, so there would be no evidence of the deed. Our mother came into the kitchen, and immediately started scolding me; Ken, what have you done? Where did you get that tar? I asked her how she knew there was any tar? She pointed to the track of tar that led in from the back door of the house to the kitchen sink, right where I was standing. I learned early in life that I am responsible for what I say, and what I do. I learned that I am accountable. In matters of the world, or of the spirit, we are accountable.

Holy Scripture has instructions for us today about taking responsibility for the reality that God has given you and me a mission.

In Deuteronomy, Moses told Israel that God would raise up a prophet to teach the people about God. That is the job of a prophet. But God warned that anybody serving as a prophet had better speak God's word faithfully, or they would suffer serious consequences: God holds prophets accountable. The warning is pretty scary, but the message is clear. Prophets were called out by God to keep people on track, or to get them back on track, on a path toward God. It is not negotiable that they take the responsibility of the job of prophet seriously.

In Matthew 28, just before Jesus' ascension, he instructed everybody who follows him to go into the world, baptizing people and teaching them about what he had come to teach about God, and about the lives God wants us to live.

You and I have been given the responsibility to be change-agents for other people; ready to share our experiences of God with other people; realizing that those words could carry the power to change people's lives forever.

In Mark: People were startled as they watched Jesus remove an unclean spirit that had overpowered a man, and was ruining his life. They saw Jesus speak just a few words; and those few words changed that man's life - forever. He was changed from being overpowered and disabled by ungodly thoughts and actions, to being set free, experiencing God first hand, and giving him new life.

It doesn't have to be as dramatic as the exorcism of an unclean spirit. We might become a non-anxious presence for couples in conflict; settling arguments in families; helping children develop good judgment and solid reasoning skills; comforting a friend when they are suffering grief from loss. God calls us to bring Him into these situations, to ask for His guidance, and to depend on His power, rather than our own. It is the power of the Spirit of Christ that lives in us.

For years I procrastinated about visiting people who were sick, or people living in nursing homes because I was afraid I didn't know enough, would say or do the wrong thing, and would do more harm than good. God arranged for me to be offered pastoral caregiving, and get trained. And what the training kept telling me was that the important part of being there for people is to BE THERE. God guides the words; God inspires the actions to take (pray); but it is our decision to BE THERE that we are accountable for.

You and I know God personally and intimately because of Jesus Christ. We have God's breath, God's Spirit living in us. We are expected to act in ways that reflect **our own** faith, but also to act in ways that **help other people** grow in moving toward God.

Give serious thought to the impact that has come from God's Spirit living in you, and the responsibility for allowing God's Word to be spoken through you. Take on the mission of being with people weak in faith, or new in faith, or inquiring about faith, and allow yourself to be an effective carrier of God's presence.

I can't think of a higher calling we have, than to be that voice for God with our children, our friends, or the people we work with. Jesus only needed a few words to overcome the unclean spirit. Long speeches are not necessary to accomplish amazing things.

May God empower you in His holy work. Amen.