

1Marks of Godly Authority

February 1, 2009 – 4 Epiphany

Rev. Paul Johns

Mark 1:21-28

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Psalm 111:10

Last Sunday I began the sermon by showing a full page picture of President Obama in connection with his inauguration. This week the focus has been on former governor Blagojevich. For the past couple of weeks we have had a lot of focus on what it means to have authority. This morning I am convinced, on the basis of the Bible, that we have some marks of authority that really shed light on what we are facing. These, of course, apply to leaders of country and states but also family, school, and work.

Let me start with our first reading which concerns Moses. Moses would be, next to King David, the most authoritative figure in Hebrew history. One thing, however, is clear. He did not speak just as an ego for himself. He spoke on behalf of God.

We need to bear in mind that, for hundreds and even thousands of years, there were rulers like the ones in Egypt who spoke like the god-king. Pharaoh was considered a god-king. When I was in China there was the same attitude toward authority. Moses was not that.

Now we jump to King David. He was brought up as a shepherd boy, but he was a military genius. Israel had never been stronger and Israel would never be as strong as under King David. Yet David was no god. He had an indecent relationship with Bathsheba and, to make matters worse, he put her husband Uriah at the front of the battle line so that he would be killed.

Then, picture this. Along comes Nathan the prophet. “David, you have sinned.” Remember David was the most powerful person in the kingdom, and here comes this prophet. “David, you have sinned.” How did David respond? Did he cut off his head. No, David wrote Psalm 51, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness. Cleanse me from my sin.” This was an authority figure, but an authority figure humble before the will and word of God.

The first characteristic of a godly authoritative figure is to be humble before the will and word of God. Not – I am a king and will do as I choose, but O God, your will and your word is number one.

The second characteristic of a godly authoritative figure is to care about the welfare of people. We go to our Gospel for today. Jesus is the authoritative person. Our Gospel says, “He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes. I have seen the archaeological remains of the synagogue at Capernaum. It is impressive. And here was Jesus teaching with authority. But now something else happens. He heals a man described as having an unclean spirit.

The people say, “What is this authority?” The authority role is lifted even higher as he ministers to the welfare of people.

About this same time Jesus is preaching what is called the Sermon on the Mount. He shows his authority. It is not to throw out a commandment that is one of the most universal in religions, namely, You shall not commit murder. But Jesus picks up on this. You have heard, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ That is correct. But I tell you, “Do not harbor the seed of murder which is hatred and anger.” The authority of Jesus says, “The commandment is good, but make it even stronger for the welfare of the people.

A little bit after, this a crowd of about 5,000 is gathered. The disciples say, “These people are hungry; what shall we do?” The authority of Jesus says, “Feed them.” And they are fed. It is authority on behalf of the welfare of people.

This has been a rather hectic week. As I lay in bed I could not help but question, “What would this world be like if authority figures practiced three things – see, seek, and do; the will and word of God; and concern for the welfare of people.”

Kurt Warner plays quarterback for the Phoenix Cardinals. He is described as one who is great in the pulpit.

We pray for leaders who will see, seek, and do the will and word of God and care about the welfare of people. Amen.