

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
January 31, 2021- The 4th Sunday after Epiphany (B)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

[Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#); Psalm 111; [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#); [Mark 1:21-28](#)

**“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?
Have you come to destroy us?” †**

I find it remarkable that this set of readings is proposed on this, the weekend of our Annual Meeting and... right before Stephen's ordination...

In Deuteronomy, we hear that God raises up prophets and teachers from among the people... and “I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak...I myself will hold accountable.” And... the prophet who presumes to speak words I do not command shall die.

This is placed alongside the passage from Mark's Gospel... of Jesus teaching and confronting 'unclean spirits' (or demons) in the synagogue at Capernaum. You can see the word play—
“What have you to do with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” It makes you wonder,

who is saying this to Jesus, the demonic spirit or the scribes and leaders of the people?

Jesus response may seem strange for us today, rebuking by saying "be silent," don't tell them who I am! This command has to do with the fact that he doesn't want *them* to name him, as in the culture of that time, naming something/ someone gave authority over the one being named (consider Adam naming all the animals in *Genesis*). Even today, naming is very powerful—when two people learn each other's names, they are bound together in a new way... and naming 'the truth' occurring in our society, distinguishes it from 'fake news' that comes from both the media and politicians.

Recognizing and naming the *demons* in our world is extremely important... for unless we name them, they can name us and control us... and destroy us. The demons I'm referring to are those that possess us as a people and a nation... *fear of the other*, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, religious intolerance, militarism, terrorism, extreme individualism, and greed. These stem, as our scriptures tell us, from losing our faith in God... from not listening to the prophets... from unbelief. When we cease to have faith and trust in God, then we begin to feel that nothing can be done to solve our

problems... whether it's the COVID pandemic, the economy, or our individual needs. We start to turn to the *unclean spirits*, *the demons* in the forms of media infused fear and the manipulation of facts by political/ government leaders. We must turn instead to God, in prayer! As many of us have experienced during our Wednesday meditation and prayer meetings, God comes to us in our prayer... not simply to calm us and put our minds at ease, but to call each of us to struggle with the demons around us, to resist despair and unbelief... allowing us to become prophets, proclaiming God's truth and God's will to those around us. Unless we name the demons, they will name us... they may get control of us and destroy us. This is not easy, it makes us unpopular, it takes courage... And as you'll hear at the Annual Meeting in a few minutes, I feel this parish family has displayed that courage and faithfulness, in a variety of ways, over this very difficult year.

Continue to pray... Keep the faith! "I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak everything I command."

In nomine Patris.... †