



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 4, Year B
January 28, 2018

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

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

God assures Israel that he will continue to communicate through prophets, even after Moses' death. Discerning who is—and who is not—speaking Yahweh's words will be critical for Israel. Those who hear God's prophet, but do not accept the prophecy, will be held accountable by God.

- How is Yahweh speaking to us in 2018? How are we responding?

Psalm 111

Yahweh is known by his works and deeds. The psalmist praises Yahweh for his enduring covenant with Israel. The word “forever” is a repeating message in this anthem: Israel's relationship with Yahweh exists in perpetuity. These were assuring words to a people who were, at times, conquered and displaced. While their land—and even the Temple—might be overrun, their relationship with Yahweh remains forever.

- 21st-century socio-cultural influences are impacting the practice of Christianity. What might we bring from Psalm 111 into our interaction with modernity?

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Paul writes to 1st-century Christians in Corinth. In this setting, the practice of Christianity was emerging amid the worship of pagan gods. Early Christians struggled to leave behind worship practices that were prevalent in their society. Paul's language recalls our Deuteronomy lesson: we will know—and God will know—those who love God by their loving ways. Paul calls Christians to leadership by empathetically addressing those who continue some of the old practices. He warns that such behaviors could mislead others to resume worshipping other gods.

- Should “the Christian life” be at odds with its cultural environ? What examples can we identify in our own setting?

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus begins his ministry in Capernaum. While teaching at a synagogue on the Sabbath, he expels an unclean spirit from a demoniac. Through the voice of the unclean spirit, Mark shares with his audience the

divine nature of Jesus. Still, Jesus is not ready for others to know his identity. Healing on the Sabbath does not rile this audience; rather, they are receptive to his teaching. By casting this scene in a synagogue on the Sabbath, Mark connects his audience with the familiar places and rituals of Judaism and then unveils the in-breaking action of God through Jesus' teaching and healing.

- Jesus chose to let his actions tell the story of his identity. How can our parish model the choice of Jesus? How will we know if our neighbors know us to be Christians?

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