

## Reflection

Monday, Jan. 27, 2020

Liturgy of the Word

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Second Samuel 5: 1 – 7, 10

Mark 3: 22 – 30

In today's first reading, we see the culmination of David's emergence as leader for the tribes of Israel. As a "tribal confederacy" surrounded by the Canaanite city states and the Philistines from the coastal plains who possessed a far superior arsenal of weaponry, the tribes wanted a leader who was not only chosen by God but successful against the warring factions around them. They recognized in David both of these realities, as of him God said, "you shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel" and his reign flourished for many years because God was with him.

Thus, we are taught that David possessed the two most important abilities for leadership in that time: to be chosen by God and prowess as a warrior and these caused the people of Israel to believe in him and his capacity to lead.

In contrast, in today's Gospel, we are told that the scribes determined that Jesus' power was rooted in Beelzebul the prince of demons, an astonishing charge that Jesus does not ignore. He summons them and addresses them in a series parabolic questions that reveal the foolish absurdity in their assertions. In an effort to discredit Jesus the scribes charge him with acting in concert with Satan – a charge that is so serious that Jesus advises them that "sins and blasphemies will be forgiven, but a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is beyond forgiveness" and is considered an everlasting sin.

The scribes accuse Jesus' source of power as evil. It is a deep lie offered as truth to undermine the impact of Jesus' healing of those who suffer. The depth of Jesus' response reveals the gravity and depravity of the accusation. They do not see, or willfully refuse to acknowledge, the Spirit at work in Jesus.

Dominican Sister Barbara Reid, professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, offers a few important takeaways from this Gospel in her book, *Parables for Preachers*.

She suggests that we examine our own "stances, presuppositions, and allegiances. Are we able to see where the true power of the Spirit is at work? Where do we notice the power of Jesus at work today? Where do we observe the liberating power of the Spirit in releasing from their bonds those who are most downtrodden? How is Christ's power manifesting in dismantling systems of injustice and domination? Where must we as Christians position ourselves individually and collectively to loose the fetters of"

discrimination, oppression and all of the *isms* so as to continue “Jesus’ work of bringing an end to the rule of evil powers?” What are we willing to endure in challenging ruling powers?

Will we be faithful to the promptings of the Spirit within us? Commitment to the Gospel can call into question not only one’s ties with powers that reinforce domination, but also with family members, friends, co-workers and community members. Conflicts can arise from differing expressions of the faith commitment, differing interpretations of the Gospel and differing ideas about the demands of discipleship.

Finally, this Gospel illustrates “the tactic for discrediting Jesus is name-calling and labeling. While in Jesus’ day this was a strategy for honoring or shaming, today we might reflect on the use of such words to stereotype and dismiss people. Jesus does not imitate his detractors by name-calling.

Naming evil is different from name-calling. Jesus names his opponents’ distorted logic and their mistaken evaluation of his deeds. But he does so by posing pointed questions (v.23), pronouncing true maxims (vv.24-27) and presenting an invitation to forgiveness (vv. 28-29). He does not label the scribes in a way that would lock them into their false positions.

Rather, his responses leave open the door for them to be persuaded to his way. This passage provides Christians an opportunity to reflect on how we speak of and to those with whom we disagree.”

So there are valuable lessons for us. We live in deeply troubling times. In leadership, David lived in God’s time and through divine guidance became the type of leader the people believed in. The Gospel affords us a way to deal with the tenacious false accusations, name calling, and labeling pervasive in our culture.

May we like David live prayerfully rooted in God so as to have the Spirit shape our capacity for leadership and demonstration of Christian prowess. May the Gospel empower us to be as shrewd and as true as Jesus was in living out the Spirit of God on behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed.

Resources: *Parables for Preachers*, Barbara E. Reid, The Liturgical Press 1999  
*The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, Abingdon Press, 2003