

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Times

January 27-28, 2018

Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1Corinthians 7: 32-35; Mark 1: 21-28

Preacher: Mike Boucher

The opening lines from today's first reading really stood out for me: "*Moses spoke to all the people, saying, 'A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin.'*" For Moses, this is not a matter of if, but when. New prophets *will* be raised up from among us.

Early Christians read a passage like this in light of the story of Jesus and saw him as the "new Moses" leading them into a new reality. But how should we read it in 2018? If scripture is meant to be a living document and a text that reveals something new to each age, how would this apply to our generation?

Oftentimes, the word "prophetic" gets associated with some kind of fortune-telling or radical activism. No doubt there are elements of that in the prophetic tradition. But theologian Walter Brueggemann says that the real task of the prophet is to "*nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.*" Prophets provide a critique of the dominant culture and energize the development of an alternative. They help to shift our perception of what is happening around us.

One of the most profound prophetic movements that I saw in 2017 working to promote an alternative to the dominant culture around us was the #metoo campaign. In October of last year, actress Alyssa Milano created the hashtag in response to all of the widespread sexual assaults/sexual harassment reports that were emerging (particularly in Hollywood and the movie industry). The "metoo" campaign was actually started 10 years earlier by Tarana Burke through her work with survivors of sexual assault (particularly among women of color) but Milano turned it into a hashtag and it went viral. Millions of women around the world posted the words #metoo – giving testimony that harassment and abuse in one form or another are a daily reality for so many women and that a toxic masculinity had become normalized.

Then just a few weeks ago, the #timesup hashtag appeared in *The New York*

Times. It was a response in support of the #metoo campaign but particularly focused on women who have less access to the media to speak about what has happened to them. The Times called for sweeping changes to insure that women are respected and treated fairly.

The #metoo and #timesup movements are a powerful call to change. Like the Hebrew prophets, the women behind these campaigns are calling us back to right relationship—reminding us that we have strayed far from how our God intends for us to live. And they are specifically reminding men—in particular, straight cis men (whose identity and gender match their birth sex)—that this form of masculinity that orients itself towards dominance and control has got to go.

Jesus was clear when he spoke to his followers that those who “lord” power over others were not practicing the values of God’s kingdom (Mk 10:42), and a masculinity that sees others as inferior, objectifies women and values conquest and competition over compassion is not reflecting God’s kin-dom either. It is likely that Jesus also had to work through some of his own internalized patriarchy (see Mk 7:24-30) and had to learn to stand against dangerous forms of masculinity. It was all around him—embedded in practically every system that operated—just as it is today. And when we lack the firsthand experience of an oppression, it can be hard to see and dismantle.

But the demon in today’s gospel obeys Jesus’ command to leave, and the witnesses recognize that a new authority has emerged on the scene. We, too, can exorcise the demon of toxic masculinity in our midst, but it will take an inner authority and resolve—especially on the part of men and men in power—to practice another way of being. It will require deep listening to the pain and experience of women (and to the pain and experience of children, the queer and trans communities and other men who have been harmed by the violence) and will require new structures of mutual respect and leadership – in our homes, businesses, places of worship and governing structures.

The prophets of our day and age have spoken clearly. May we now nurture, nourish and evoke a new reality that we can all live into. It is to our collective peril if we don’t. #timesup