

**1/6 Holy Communion, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

An ancient piece of writing today -  
a little bit from Deuteronomy.  
(The account of Moses' final sermon  
before the Hebrews entered the Promised land.)

Moses has been giving lots of instructions.  
Some of them most important.

For forty years this little collection of tribes  
has been wandering in the desert.  
God has been teaching them to trust him,  
and to discover  
his goodness and his generosity and his grace.

Now, as they cross the river into the Promised Land  
they will find themselves among foreign tribes.

These tribes are a bit of a mixture,  
but some are really bad news.  
They have bad habits,  
religious, social, political economic, etc.  
oppression and discrimination,  
corruption and bribery  
prostitution and slavery  
abuse of power and position.

And some very bad habits -  
divination and sorcery -  
omens, witchcraft, spells -  
child sacrifice to appease the (demonic) false gods.

Do not imitate these ways, says Moses.

**The Promise of God:  
God who gives authority**

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
of Epiphany**

**Mark 1. 21 - 28  
Deuteronomy 18. 15 - 20**

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God will help -  
our little bit of reading in Deuteronomy 18 says that  
God will raise up, from time to time,  
a prophet to teach the people  
what God wants them to hear.

And here we see again -  
this God who gives authority.

verse 15

*You must listen to him.*

verse 18

*I will put my words in his mouth.*

verse 19

*if anyone does not listen to my words  
that the prophet speaks in my name  
I myself will call him to account.*

The person that God raises up in this way  
verse 15 and 17

*a prophet like you [Moses]  
from among their brothers*

will be an ordinary person  
but then endowed with God's authority.  
His word will be law!

This is not a popular message in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
our "post-modern age" where authority is despised.  
Everyone's word or opinion  
is as good as anyone else's.

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But for the protection of the people  
to protect them from false prophets  
or bad prophets,  
God makes other promises.

Verse 20

If he speaks what God has not told him  
or worse, speaks in the name of other (false) gods  
must be put to death.

And how will they know?

If what he says, verse 22, is not of God  
God will soon show him up to be a liar.  
Do not fear such a person.

So this is a dangerous occupation.

If someone is called by God to speak for him,  
and if that person is faithful to God's call,  
God will bless that person's ministry,  
and God will bless those who follow him or her.

But it is not a ministry to be taken up lightly.

Yes, God calls and gives authority.

But those who stand in their own authority  
and speak presumptuously,  
place themselves in great peril before God.

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This is why the church takes such care over selecting and training its ministers.

Frances, not with us today or next week, because of her training commitments, has been put through the mill for selection and is going through another mill for training,

and those mills grind slowly, and thoroughly.

But you know, at the end, that you have someone tried and tested by the church tried and tested by God, whose word and whose ministry is to be respected. Not because I say so, or because the bishop says so, but because God says so.

And that servant of God then carries and awesome burden of responsibility, which you cannot begin to imagine if God has not laid it on you.

But reflect on the seriousness of those words in Deuteronomy. "Held to account by God". "Shall be put to death."

This is not a bid to deify the clergy.

But it is a reminder, that one of God's ways to lead us and instruct us, is to call and send among us, people who have something to say.

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So every one of us,  
no matter how spiritually mature, or wise, or learned,  
every one of us needs to hear from God.

And we need to hear,  
not just by private divine revelation,  
but through the wisdom and teaching of others.

As I said at the start,  
in this "post-modern" world.  
people think "the University of Life" is all they need.

Worse, all I need is "the University of My life".  
as if any one person held the answers  
to all the puzzles in the universe.

And we all face puzzles, every day.  
Life choices, ethical dilemmas.  
How to understand world politics,  
and national economics.  
What to make of benefit capping,  
and Scottish independence,  
and embryo experimentation.

How much money to give to church.

Whether to join something, or leave something,  
to support someone, and they become weaker  
or let them fend for themselves,  
but become stronger, or maybe fail.

## 6/6 Holy Communion, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2012

All of these decisions are made by people like us.

It is what Deuteronomy is about.

It is what life is about.

It is what God speaks to us about.

So let us be attentive to the many ways  
that God speaks to us.

And when we hear, and have tested,  
let us resolve to heed what God says.

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## Setting the Scene

My notes today suggested we were to play a game.  
Four people sit in a row, and they play the game in turn.  
It involved clapping a rhythm,  
calling out names in time,  
and if you got it wrong,  
you move to the bottom end of the row.

The winner is the one who gets to the top, and stays there.

I always find that sort of game depressing  
because I always end up near the bottom.

So some people always turn out to be winners  
and some losers.

Some find their way to the front of every queue  
and some always seem to be at the back.

Some people always seem to get a good deal or a bargain,  
others always seem to lose out.

Has anybody else noticed that?

Is there anyone who feels like me -  
an "Eeyore" sort of character -  
"I seem to be left to the end!"

What does it feel like?  
Second class - not important - left out.  
Lonely and sad sometimes

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Now in the synagogue at Capernaum,  
Jesus' home town,  
was there anyone who might have felt like that  
bottom of the pile, not important, never chosen?

Could it be that the demon-possessed man  
was treated like that.

He was an eccentric sort of chap  
and in the habit of shouting out  
at inconvenient times!  
He would have been very annoying.

People probably wished he wasn't there  
and also probably treated him as if he wasn't there.  
How did he feel - a happy man, or a sad man?

On that day, Jesus didn't ignore him.  
What he called out was annoying, embarrassing,  
inappropriate - but true!

*"I know who you are -  
the holy One of God!"*

Jesus wanted him to keep quiet  
[Little puzzle - why?  
Not yet the right time for Jesus to be revealed?  
We are not quite sure.]

Certainly - it was important for Jesus to be in charge,  
and set the agenda -  
not this man's demon!

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In any case - Jesus would have been angry that this unfortunate man had come under the control of such an evil force.

So he tells him to be quiet - not the man - but the demonic voice.

And - as we would expect - but to their astonishment! the demon obeyed Jesus.

So there is a number of things happening.

1. Jesus pays attention to the needs of a neglected and insignificant person.
2. Jesus delivers someone who is in distress. An act of compassion. An act of healing.
3. Jesus has been teaching and now he demonstrates his authority. They know he was different from their teachers. Now they know why - he has God's authority.
4. Jesus is revealed, to those who are prepared to notice as the Holy One of God and a teacher, and miracle worker with the power and authority of God.

And so we see God revealed as

1. A loving caring God
2. A God who gives authority to his called servants
3. A God who will accomplish himself what his people cannot do for themselves.

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So that's our theme for today.

This God who gives authority  
for his anointed servants  
to accomplish his tasks  
as he promised.

God who gives Authority.

**More later**

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Birthdays and presentations

Testimony time and Collection