

**Sunday, January 28, 2024 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany**  
**“Among Your Own People”**  
**Deuteronomy 18:15-20 and Mark 1:21-28**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). Have participants answer: “How can we discern if a prophet or prophetess is speaking in the name of God and not in the name of other gods?”

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20 Context.** Deuteronomy is the fifth of the “Five Books of Moses” (aka Pentateuch or Torah), and its name is a Greek word that means “second law.” The narrative setting of the book places the people of Israel as they are about to cross the Jordan River from the plains of Moab in the east to the Promised Land, after having wandered in the wilderness for some 40 years following their liberation from slavery in Egypt. The book is largely one long “farewell address” given by Moses, who rehearses with the people what they have come to know of God’s deeds and God’s intention for them. From an historical-critical point of view, Deuteronomy is a recasting of the Torah story, beginning in the 7th c. BC with the cultic reforms of King Josiah and continuing into the 6th c. with the trauma of Israel’s captivity and exile in Babylon, and their eventual return to their homeland. The central portion of the book, chapters 12-26, sometimes called the “deuteronomic law code,” is broadly structured according to the Ten Commandments. This week’s reading falls under the Fourth Commandment, honor your parents, dealing with the respect due to society’s authorities, here a “prophet like Moses.” The first part of the passage refers to the account in Exodus 20, when God spoke the first ten commandments to Moses and the people at Sinai (also called Horeb) accompanied by thunder, fire and smoke. At which point the fearful people begged to be dismissed and asked that Moses be their go-between for the rest of what God had to say.

**Mark 1:21-28 Context.** Immediately after his account of the call of the first disciples, the evangelist tells of Jesus teaching in the synagogue and there casting out an “unclean spirit.” These spirits or “demons” were a fixture of the ancient worldview: unseen spiritual forces, generally evil or unclean, that populated the world of human existence. Today, the behavior formerly attributed to demon possession is generally diagnosed under the heading of epilepsy or mental illness. But the evangelist’s main point in telling the story of Jesus casting out the demon is not so much to show Jesus as a psychologist but to show that Jesus has power and authority over the forces of evil and darkness. The evil spirit recognizes that Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the contest is that the kingdom of God is breaking in and over human experience. Ironically, it is the demon who recognizes Jesus’ identity as the “Holy One of God,” not the people – they see only the power of an exorcist.

## **Read Deuteronomy 18:15-20 and Mark 1:21-28**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

## **Read Deuteronomy 18:15-20 and Mark 1:21-28 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Why did the Israelites need a prophet? Do we need prophets or prophetesses now?
- Mark 1:22 says, "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." What does it mean for Jesus to teach as one who has authority?
- Why did the impure spirit recognize the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24)?
- *"Like the prophet who comes from within the people of God, sometimes the demonic does as well. We ought to be as quick to call out what is wrong within us and among us as we are to point out how bad things are 'out there.'"* How can a community of faith discern and unmask the evil that might exist within it?
- Ephesians 4:11 (NIV) says, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers." Have you or has someone in your community been given the gift of prophecy?
- *"The community of faith can be a supportive incubator for those who discern a call to leadership or ministry of various kinds."* How can your faith community be supportive so its members can fulfill their God-given call?

## **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of Power, when we face the evil and suffering in the world, help us remember that you are present among us. You continue choosing prophets and prophetesses within our communities to unmask and resist the powers and principalities at work in the world. Please give us the wisdom and strength we need to join in their ministry of resistance.  
**Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.