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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany |
| Year B RCL |

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Mark 1:21-28

Psalm 111

**The Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20**

Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

**The Response**

**Psalm 111**

***Confitebor tibi***

1 Hallelujah!  
I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, \*  
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

2 Great are the deeds of the Lord! \*  
they are studied by all who delight in them.

3 His work is full of majesty and splendor, \*  
and his righteousness endures for ever.

4 He makes his marvelous works to be remembered; \*  
the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

5 He gives food to those who fear him; \*  
he is ever mindful of his covenant.

6 He has shown his people the power of his works \*  
in giving them the lands of the nations.

7 The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice; \*  
all his commandments are sure.

8 They stand fast for ever and ever, \*  
because they are done in truth and equity.

9 He sent redemption to his people;  
he commanded his covenant for ever; \*  
holy and awesome is his Name.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; \*  
those who act accordingly have a good understanding;  
his praise endures for ever.

**The Epistle**

**1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

**The Gospel**

**Mark 1:21-28**

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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There is something entirely unnameable about the power of Christ which is to say that there is something entirely unnameable about the power of God.

Unnameable is not unknowable, although one could argue that we are known by God, we can only know a fraction of God.   The power of God is something familiar to us in scripture, perhaps in our personal knowledge of the creator God— watching nature’s miracles even the daily displays of beauty, in our personal knowledge of what we have experienced in the saving power of Christ, and in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit working in the world around us.

The reading from Deuteronomy this week has instructions to the Israelites about how to pay attention to prophets. It is not a punishment of Moses that God is saying his time is done, but instead a way forward between God and God’s people. It is a way to look for new prophets, to recognize God’s power as a force speaking through an individual, almost a how-to manual for recognizing what is of God and what isn’t.

This unnameable power of God can be known by what it is not. It is not threatened. This overwhelming power of the most high God, Jesus Christ, is not even in the same league as idols. Idols, the gods (little g gods), are without power, and cannot threaten what is all in all.  Paul is clear on this. This is not Paul’s main point in this portion of his letter to people in Corinth,  but it is still important.

The Gospel of Mark is telling about the power of Jesus.  The specifics of the power are not as important with Mark.  Most of miracles in the Gospel of Mark are healing miracles and most of those involve casting out of demons, a power opposed to God’s. The specifics of what happens is not given in this story, but what we do learn is that the demon knows from where Jesus’ power comes.  It is the resolution and  the restoration to health of the individual that is the most important part. Then and now health crises can keep a person from community and community worship is important. Restoration of health restores wholeness—which is not to put down or denigrate the scribes and pharisees, learned people are also important, but bringing people to wholeness is more important.

What we hope for today is in some ways not very different. Medicine has made tremendous advances, there is no question. BUT we all know not everything is healed with a pill. Sometimes only the symptoms are put at bay. Just this year we are reminded in the news that the flu can kill.  And sometimes side effects of medicines are too difficult.  Of course, there are the other things that aren’t purely physical.  There is mental illness. There are broken relationships. And of course, we learn that the physical, mental, spiritual, and our relationships are all tied together too. We still hope and pray and desperately need the healing power of Jesus.

And thankfully, with great gratitude, we can get glimpses or be struck astounded by the healing power of Jesus in the Eucharist. The body and blood of Christ given for you is given to make you whole.  In the words of St. Paul, Jesus is and has always been about building up.

What is hoped for today is that you are built up, maybe by the readings maybe they stir you, maybe somewhat by the words of the sermon, maybe the hymns lift you today, maybe by the actions of the people in church with you, but hopefully at least a little by the Eucharist.   The building up of the Eucharist is transformative and when we are open to it, the Eucharist can shape us ethically and heal us through the the body and blood of Christ to become the gathered body of Christ, whole with forgiveness for each other and a hurting world with all of its brokenness—earthly, creaturely, human physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and relational brokenness.

There is something entirely unnameable about the power of Christ which is to say that there is something entirely unnameable about the power of God.  This power that is God and Jesus’s in God belongs entirely to God, but may we come to know that power often and always in the bread and wine given for us, and may we be grateful for that.