

Intermediaries

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Mark 1:21-28; Psalm 111 2-01-09

Many times in our lives we rely on other people to help us move forward. We might talk to an attorney and engage him or her to mediate some legal problem, we might seek out a therapist to act as a buffer between where we are in life and where we want to be, or, we might ask a friend to help us work out a relationship with another friend that has gone awry. Some parents even try to keep a hapless child around to act as a buffer between the two of them because they have lost the ability to communicate with and deal with one another. The poor child, until he or she catches on, acts as a go between for the parents. This is a difficult situation for all concerned.

The use of intermediaries comes somewhat naturally to us humans. Our religious systems have used go-betweens that serve to separate those in a particular system from a god or a higher being. This seems to have been the pattern from the earliest days when religion began to be practiced. In almost all systems there is a priest or pastor or rabbi or shaman specially called to help people understand what it is their creator is saying to them and what that being requires of them.

Noah, Abraham, Moses and all the prophets acted in this role in Judaism. In Deuteronomy we are told that the people themselves requested such a person so that they would not have to deal with God directly. That was just too scary.

Jesus was given this role in Christianity, by those who recorded his life. As a result, it became woven into the structure of the church, as a hierarchy created by our early church fathers. In many denominations of Christianity this pattern continues.

But, if we stop to consider our faith system, we should begin to understand that Jesus tried to tell us that we need no one between us and God. He taught us how to pray directly to God no matter who we might be or where we might be in life. He tried to tell those who followed him, and us, that we could do what he did and even greater things if we put our entire beings into living the lives we have been called to live.

In our story from the gospel of Mark, Jesus performed an act of healing and through this action was thought of as a person with authority. People were inclined to grant him the status of an intermediary so that they could keep the buffer zone between themselves and God. This appointed intermediary would do all of God's work and would feed them what they needed to know in bite-sized pieces. I don't think Jesus bought into this.

As we read the stories of the life of Jesus, we often find him sending out his disciples, in twos, to teach and preach and heal in the same manner in which he performed those duties. The power and ability that he possessed he thought should be a shared responsibility. His idea was that those early disciples would go out and heal, and teach and preach in his name, creating other disciples that would do the same spreading his gospel of love in ever widening circles.

We are also the Disciples of Christ, the followers of our religious tradition. Our lives are very busy and somehow we manage to turn away from the idea that we could be even a little like Jesus. We like to put ourselves first in most situations. We need special events and instances to spur us forward into considering others. But, our religion is not meant to be lived in such a way that we pick and choose when and if we will respond to a need.

Instead, it is to be a way of life of generosity, inclusion and love. When we live life in such a way, we discover that we become the preachers and teachers and healers in our world.

As Congregationalists, we should know this. We are all equally responsible for handling the tasks set before us. Our pastors are placed along side us, not above us. The prayers of each and every one of us are heard in the same way. All members of the church have one vote. It is our polity, the way we run our churches. No one person, in our system can speak for a church or “the church.” Our system came to be because we believe that as it is with us, it was with Jesus and his followers. A simple system in which we all have our say and we move forward, as best we can, through the process of consensus.

So, while we might like a prophet or a priest we can turn to for an authoritative decision on church matters, or to protect us from God and take all the blows, we do not have one. The responsibility for the relationship we have with God rests in our hands, just as it has for the followers of Christ through the ages. Would we have it any other way?

-- Amen