

The Big Kahuna
A sermon by David Barker
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Scripture: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Mark 1:21-28

I find Oprah Winfrey...interesting

- I should confess from the very beginning that I'm probably just jealous because Oprah has a magazine she gets to appear on the cover of every month and I don't
- that said, what really interests me about Oprah is her *power*
- Oprah has become this extraordinarily powerful cultural arbiter
 - in so many ways, about so many things, for so many millions of people the world over, Oprah sets the benchmark for what is good and right and important and worth your time and money...and what is not
- she sets tastes in books and other forms of media...she is a, perhaps *the*, resource for information concerning virtually every area of life
- entire careers are built on a relationship with Oprah
 - you're Oprah's doctor, Oprah's therapist, Oprah's ex, Oprah's best friend
- there is Oprah's magazine, of course, her TV specials, her 24/7 radio network, Oprah Radio...and, now, her own television channel, the Oprah Winfrey Network
- so many people defining so much of their lives according to Oprah, which raises, to my mind at least, questions...not the least of which is *how?*
 - there is no denying her business saavy, her immense wealth
 - but how...how did a local talk show host from Chicago become the locus of truth about so many things to so many people?
 - how, indeed, did she assume this identity, this *authority*?

Like any good rhetorical speaker, I pose these questions with no intention of actually answering them

- should you really be interested, the details of how Oprah Winfrey went from local talk show host to worldwide cultural phenom can be found many places, including oprahwinfrey.com
- the answer I do want to explore, however, is this:
- Oprah has the authority she does because it is invested in her by her audience
 - I'm taking nothing away from her intelligence, her hard work...that's not the point
- the point, I think, is this: the authority Oprah has is authority her audience gives her by listening to her and, to varying degrees, doing what she says, thereby identifying with what she represents

Now to the extent that's true, Oprah is no different from millions of other people around the world...and that includes *me*, even without my own magazine

--I wasn't born a pastor...I discerned a call to ministry, I worked hard and sacrificed to become one...and, yes, I am ordained, I have "Rev." in front of my name

--but to the extent I have any authority at all, it isn't because I was born with it... *you* give it to me...you willingly choose to follow my lead as pastor (most of you, anyway), and this in spite of the fact that none of you can become multi-millionaires for being my best friend

--but as willingly as you choose to follow my lead, you could just as easily choose *not* to...and then I really have no authority at all

--one day Oprah could wake up, find her audience has disappeared, and *she'd* have no authority at all

--which leads to another question...for me, for Oprah, for all the millions of the people around the world who claim some authority...

--if I lose my authority, I'm not really a pastor anymore...and if that happens, what happens to my identity? who am I?

One of the things I love about the Gospel of Mark is that every word counts...in Mark, things happen *fast*

--just consider: in the first 15 verses of Mark are the first 30 years of Jesus' life ...born, baptized, tempted, begins his public ministry

--and I love Mark, too, because Mark focuses like a laser on the questions of identity and authority: just who is this Jesus of Nazareth and where does he get off saying what he says and doing what he does?

--those first 15 verses again...look what Mark does

--right off the bat, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" ...verse 1, we know Jesus' identity, who Jesus is

--then we discover He is the One God promised through the prophets, the one the Israelites themselves asked for in the passage we read this morning from Deuteronomy

--Jesus is baptized and as he comes up out of the water, God names and claims Him...verse 11..."You are my Son, the Beloved"

--Jesus is tempted by Satan...verses 12 and 13...but defeats Satan and does so because of who Mark has told us he is—the Son of God—and we know what that means

--Jesus begins his public ministry...verse 14...saying the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom has come near, and can make these claims, again, because of who Jesus is and what that means

--and when Jesus calls his disciples...verses 16-20...what do they do?

--*immediately* they leave what they're doing and follow him...

why? because of who Jesus is and what that means

And we come to our passage this morning, where Jesus enters the synagogue and teaches

--note Mark says nothing about the content of what Jesus teaches...Mark is interested only in the people's reaction

--*they were astounded*, we're told, for Jesus taught them not as the scribes did but as one having *authority*

--the scribes...Pharisees...teachers...those to whom was entrusted the passing-on not only of Scripture but the explanation and understanding of Scripture... explanation and understanding built-up over centuries and handed down generation to generation

--but Jesus...Jesus taught with authority...the authority *not* of one who knew what *others* said and understood about the Word, but with the authority of one who *was* the Word

--the demon recognized Jesus' identity and authority immediately: "I know who you are...the Holy One of God" and Jesus defeated him as he had Satan in the wilderness

--and, again, Mark speaks of the people's reaction: *They were all amazed*...and they kept asking, what is this?

The case can be made that this question is *the* question of Mark's Gospel...the question of the identity and authority of Jesus of Nazareth

--and the answer Mark provides—Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God—is as extraordinary now as it was then

--many before and many since have claimed to be the way, to have the answer, to speak with true authority

--but the difference with Jesus, of course, is that unlike all those before and since, Jesus' identity and authority were both a function of the fact that he was *God*

--Jesus did not have his authority given to him by those who followed him, wasn't the Son of God because those around him agreed to agree that he was

--his authority, his identity had nothing to do with what anyone did or did not do...then, now, forever

--Jesus' authority was and is rooted solely in his identity, and his identity is contingent on *nothing* of this world

--God is God, with all that that means, whether we believe it or not

God is God, with all that that means, whether we believe it or not...

--that may seem like an awfully simplistic, maybe even a silly thing to say...but consider this:

--Jesus, in the first 28 verses of Mark, demonstrates himself to be ruler over all powers and authorities, the source of the very Word of God, and no earthly being in any of those same verses—not John the Baptist, not the disciples, not the people in the synagogue—*none of them* fully believed or understood what that meant...yet Jesus still possessed the identity and authority Jesus possessed

Which brings us, I think, to something about *Truth*

--Jesus, who said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life”

--the Truth of Jesus...of Jesus’ words...of his identity...the Truth of his authority... all is Truth whether we believe it or not

--should the world awaken tomorrow without a believer to be found...no one, anywhere, who believes Jesus’ words, his identity, his authority, Jesus would still be the Son of God, still be the Way...still be Truth

--you see, no one has to believe Jesus’ words true for them to be true, no one has to submit to Jesus’ authority in order for him to have authority

--we don’t have to buy Jesus’ magazine, read the book he recommends, watch his TV network, listen to his friends Peter and Paul or his doctor Luke...

--we do not all have to agree that Jesus *is* the Big Kahuna in order for Jesus to *be* the Big Kahuna

--which means that the truth, the identity, the authority of Jesus Christ are not ours to argue about and decide upon as we will, not ours to make and re-make into what, depending upon our needs of the moment, we want them to be

--this is something, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that Christianity is still struggling to understand

--we can accept these things or we can reject them but they are what they are no matter what we do...

--and that is something we forget or ignore at our peril

--does that mean we shouldn’t question, shouldn’t seek, shouldn’t discuss or discern or think about or wrestle with these things?

--no, of course not...but it does mean that you and I don’t make Jesus Christ the way you and I make Oprah Winfrey...or David Barker

And, I think, it also means one thing more

--I posed the question earlier, if I lose my authority, if I'm not really a pastor anymore...what happens to my identity? who am I?

--the fact that Jesus is who Jesus is *because* Jesus is means that what I do and who I am are not really one-and-the-same

--being a pastor is what I do...a beloved child of God through Jesus Christ is who I am...and because Jesus' identity does not change, neither does mine... neither does yours...no matter what we ever do