

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Deuteronomy 18:15-20

“Look Closely and See... God’s Powerful Prophet!

- 1. Sent because of a deep need**
- 2. Sent with great authority**
- 3. Sent having a vital message**

**Hymns: 411 – 556 – Distribution: 93, 85 –
Closing: “Glorify Thy Name”**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”

¹⁷ The LORD said to me: “What they say is good.

¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”

Great messengers have delivered great messages down through history! You probably remember some:

- 26.2 miles – The modern day marathon. This has come about because about 500 B.C. the Greek herald Pheidippides ran the 26 miles from the battlefield near Marathon to Athens to announce the Greek victory over Persia with the word “Nenikékamen,” (we have won) and collapsed and died on the spot from exhaustion.
- Or, “Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of... Paul Revere. On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five; hardly a man is now alive who remembers that famous day and year.” Paul Revere had to tell the early Americans that the British army was coming.

What exciting news these messengers had to tell! And what memorable messengers they have been down through the history books.

Such messengers could rightly be called “prophets.” The nature of a prophet is that he faithfully delivers a message that is not his own, but has been entrusted to him by someone else.

Today we see the most exciting, vital message and the greatest Prophet that ever was. As we gather in the Epiphany season, we continue to see readings in Scripture that reveal that Christ is truly the Son of God, our Messiah, who was promised by God. This morning we focus on the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy 18, which talks about a Prophet. As we do that, let’s **“Look Closely and See... God’s Powerful Prophet!**

- 1. Sent because of a deep need**
- 2. Sent with great authority**
- 3. Sent having a vital message**

1. Sent because of a deep need

We read Moses' words to the Old Testament Israelites in Deuteronomy 18: *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.'"*

When Moses said those words, he was delivering his farewell speech to the nation of Israel. For 40 years he had led them through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, and now was his time to leave them and go to his heavenly home. As he leaves, he speaks of a great Prophet God would send that would be like him.

Moses himself had served as a prophet because of a deep need that Israel had. He refers to this need in his reference to Mt. Horeb. Do you remember the circumstances he's referring to? At Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, we hear in Exodus 19: *"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder."* (Ex. 19)

Can you picture the scene? It was so scary that we read later, *"When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'"* The people asked to have

Moses be their prophet so they would not have to face the holy, righteous, awesome God in front of them. He terrified them by his presence, for he is holy and just.

This should not be a strange concept to us. After all, would you like to meet God face to face on your own terms?

Probably the clearest time today that people can see the power and majesty of God and their own puniness is in catastrophes of nature. Have you experienced any in your life? An earthquake that left you quaking? A tornado or hurricane that left you trembling and in awe? A storm that made you afraid? A tsunami? A volcanic eruption? A period without power or the regular comforts we're accustomed to? A time when you saw how small and needy you really are? Compound your puniness with the fact that you are sinful. Imagine meeting this powerful, holy God on your own merits, knowing that you're sunk because of your sins and guilt. You don't have a leg to stand on. That thought should terrify you beyond belief.

Because of the children of Israel's fear, the Lord said in our reading, *"What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers."* God would continue to speak to them and minister to them through prophets in their Old Testament history.

We also sense in reading these words that there is a special Prophet – a singular one – referred to in these verses. And this is correct. Hebrews 3 compares Moses and Christ: *"Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself... Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house."*

Christ was sent as the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in our text. He was sent because of great needs that existed in the world:

- SIN – Jesus came to preach about the continued depravity of mankind’s condition that still had not been fixed by God. He had to clearly preach about sin, even to religious leaders that felt they were not so bad and pretty close to God.
- Confusion about the Messiah’s mission – Unfortunately, in Jesus’ day many had a mistaken notion about the Messiah. Many viewed him as a mere political figure. Their spiritual condition and direction was pathetic, due to the failure of their prophets and leaders. As Jesus noted, they were “*harassed and helpless,*” like sheep without a shepherd.

How great was their need for a Prophet, and how great is our need as well.

2. Sent with great authority

By the grace of God, we read in Deuteronomy 18 about the great Prophet who would come with God’s own authority: “*I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.*”

Moses had this remarkable authority when he served as God’s prophet. We read interesting things about his position and ministry in Numbers 12: “*The LORD said, ‘Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of*

the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’”

Moses had the privilege of communicating with God literally, as the Hebrew says “mouth to mouth.” He had God’s authority and message in his words. This was borne out multiple times when someone wanted to oppose Moses’ authority, and therefore, God’s authority, when his own sister and brother – Miriam and Aaron – jealously opposed him, or when Korah’s rebellion took place. The Old Testament Israelites needed to listen to Moses as if they were listening to God, for he had God’s authority behind him.

It was the same at Christ’s time, when the great Prophet came to bring God the Father’s message. We see this clearly in the Gospel reading for today. In Mark 1 we read, “*They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*” They could sense the authority in his words. They also witnessed it as Christ did an amazing miracle in casting a demon out of a man when the demon opposed him.

Jesus knew he was the Prophet that Moses had spoken about. In John 5 he said, “*If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.*” As far as his Father’s authority, Jesus also said in John 12, “*I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it... Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.*”

The conclusion they should have reached is clear: They should listen! What is sad about Jesus’ ministry is the fact that the leaders and many of the people in his day did not listen. They did even worse than that. In the end, out of hate they plotted against him and murdered him. How great is God’s judgment against those who reject the One sent by his authority!

3. Sent having a vital message

We see the true tragedy of this when we realize the message that Christ the Prophet had come to bring. We haven't even mentioned this message yet – This is the most important part of all!

What was the message from God that Moses was to reveal to the nation? Moses is often referred to as the "lawgiver." At a time when God's Old Testament people had forgotten what God's laws were and were in a stubborn, rebellious period of their history, God needed to reveal his Ten Commandments to them. He also chose to give them a multitude of laws for civil life, religious life, and their daily lives. These laws were for their good. They reminded the people of what God wanted and how far they had fallen short in their personal lives. **These laws also were intended to keep them worshiping and thinking about the Messiah who was to come one day. This was the essence of God's Old Testament law and of Moses' ministry!**

The message that Christ brought was different. John 1 says, *"The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* Jesus was connected to Moses' message insofar as he fulfilled it. He kept the laws of God perfectly for us. In fact, he did away with the letter of the Old Testament laws of civil, religious, and daily life – the Sabbath, animal sacrifices, certain festivals, etc. All those laws had led up to the great Prophet but were not intended to be in effect for all time. This is because Christ freed us from the law by keeping it and sacrificing his life for your sins against it. When you did not keep God's laws, Jesus paid for your sins and guilt by giving his life as a payment for your wrongdoing. The book of Hebrews talks about that sacrifice. Hebrews 10 says, *"First (Christ) said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire,*

nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Despite the irony that the great Prophet that Moses prophesied about was the One murdered for his message, God brought about your salvation through his suffering and death. This is the amazing, vital message about Christ!

What a fitting day it is to reflect on how the great Prophet continues to teach his people. What can we say about the role of God's prophets with the same three points we've discussed so far?

- The need for them
- Their authority
- Their message

Ephesians 4 says, *"It was (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*

As far as the need, God in his wisdom has seen that his people need shepherds and ministers to bring to his people in New Testament times. He has provided these in called workers – pastors and teachers – for the benefit of your faith. I suppose God could have planned that you personally can grow spiritually on your own. But he hasn't planned it that way. God could have planned

that congregations could do all their work and carry out their mission – including spiritual ministry – by volunteers. But God has not done that. He has filled a great need of yours by graciously giving you spiritual guides and shepherds in your church. He has given his church shepherds to also equip the people of our church for doing your ministry to our world by reaching out with the gospel. He has said, *“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”* (Luke 10:16)

What about that gospel message prophets today bring? It may seem easy enough to say, “Oh yes, our pastors and church are supposed to stand up for and proclaim the truth of God’s Word.” In fact we see how strongly God felt about the truth being proclaimed in our reading: *“A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”*

In New Testament times we don’t have this command to kill false teachers, but we have verses like:

- *“Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”* (Romans 16:17)
- *“Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymaneus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.”* (2 Timothy 2:17,18)

God still hates false teaching and wants us to have no part of it. In the face of all this, though, how surprising it is that people wonder why we would not join in worship and ministry with other churches that have

promoted teachings like the rapture, decision theology, and who withhold baptism from infants; from churches who promote the earthly Millennium, who teach that your good works contribute to your salvation, and who believe the Lord’s Supper is just a symbol of Christ’s body and blood. May God help us to shun false teaching instead of overlooking it, and enable us to stand firm on the complete truth he has revealed!

Finally, what a reason we have to praise our God today. He has supplied prophets that are more important than any other worldly messengers of history. He supplied them for his Old Testament and New Testament people, as well as sending his Son, the great Prophet, to reveal his salvation. May this give us great joy today! Amen.