

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 2 July 2023
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 13

1st Reading: *Jeremiah 28:5-9*

Psalm: *89:1-4, 15-18*

2nd Reading: *Romans 6:12-23*

Gospel: *Matthew 10:40-42*

Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø*

In the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Is there anyone here whose burning ambition in life is to be a prophet? No takers? I didn't think so.

Being a prophet was never a coveted job. Speaking God's Word to call his people back to the right path, often proclaiming God's judgement, but also proclaiming his Gospel, was seldom a career choice that was high on people's list.

Last week, as you may recall, we heard one of Jeremiah's complaints to God that being a prophet meant reproach, mockery and derision, and yet Jeremiah couldn't contain the messages he had received from God - he had to speak them out. He couldn't help but be a prophet, whether he wanted to or not.

And now this week Jeremiah finds himself at odds with another supposed prophet, named Hananiah, who was telling the king that he should not heed Jeremiah's words of doom and gloom, that instead everything would work out wonderfully, just the way the king wanted things to be. Jeremiah answers Hananiah and says: "I sure wish that were true, but unfortunately God has shown me that bad times are coming, and you need to follow what God wants you to do in this situation."

And then Jeremiah gives us one of the two tests we have in the Scriptures for determining if someone is truly a prophet. And it's a pretty simple test really: If what the prophet predicts doesn't come true, then he isn't a true prophet, is he? And, of course, if we read further in this chapter of Jeremiah we will find that what Hananiah was predicting did not come true at all, however much the king may have wanted it to. Instead, as it turns out, Hananiah himself died a few months later and everything that Jeremiah had predicted did indeed happen.

So when we hear modern-day would-be prophets who tell us that the end of the world is coming on such-and-such a date, and yet the world continues spinning well after that date, it's pretty clear that this was not a prophet sent by God.

The second test of a true prophet is also quite simple, although it isn't mentioned by Jeremiah, but perhaps it is hinted at by Jesus in today's Gospel when he says, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me". A real prophet is always true to the faith we have received, handed down to us by the Fathers, as we sang in our first hymn this morning. A true prophet always honours Jesus as the Son of God and as true man, who died and rose for our salvation. He proclaims as Paul does in our reading from Romans this morning that the "free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So, again, if there are self-proclaimed prophets or self-proclaimed messiahs who exult themselves instead of exalting Jesus, don't listen to them. Remember that Jesus has warned us that "many will come in my name, saying 'I am the Christ', and they will lead many astray". In other words, they usurp the title of Messiah which belongs to Jesus alone. And yes, we've seen this play out over and over again with cult leaders claiming to be sent from God, or claiming that they themselves are divine or the chosen one. And it never seems to end well with them, does it? Just as it didn't with Hananiah. So don't listen to them. Don't welcome their words.

Instead, Jesus tells us this morning, welcome those who come as his servants and his disciples, speaking his words. His words are truth. This has been proven over and over down through the centuries. And when we welcome one of his disciples, no matter how seemingly insignificant, we welcome Jesus himself.

And then there's the other side of it. Jesus wasn't telling his disciples how they should welcome prophets, he was talking about how people would receive them as prophets, and anyone who received them as prophets received Christ who sent them, and received the Father. And whatever Jesus told his disciples he is telling us as well.

So whether we like it or not, we are all prophets to one extent or another. Whatever we do and whatever we say to others who know that we are Christians, we say and do on behalf of Jesus himself. When we do good for others, it is Jesus acting through us to do good. And those who receive good from our hands receive it from God.

Perhaps this means that we do need to be careful in how we act toward others, since we are representing Christ to them, and so we do want to be sure that we are faithful to him and speak and do the truth. But it is also a promise that what we do for others as Christians really does do good in the world, and when we are welcomed as Christians, it is Christ who is being welcomed. And so those who do welcome us and hear us when we speak and act for Christ receive the grace and the blessing of God from us. Even a cup of water given and received in the name of Jesus is a blessing, both for the giver and for the one who receives it.

So let us not be afraid to be prophets, to be those who bring God's word of grace to the world. We do not do so in vain. We ourselves become a means of grace to others, through whom the Gospel of Christ. And in that light, let us sing:

Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let us seek
your straying children, lost and lone.

Amen!

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