

Sermon: 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20 (v. 15)

Theme: God's Prophet

Goal: That the hearer will be sure that God speaks through His messengers who preach His Word.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *Today in Africa* (and I think all around the world as well) *there are dozens of new denominations founded on the basis that a leader heard the voice of God or had a revelation. Care must be taken to assess whether these leaders are truly speaking God's Word, or whether they are running the church for their own financial gain and trapping the unwary* (ABC 235). What are the criteria to recognize if someone is speaking God's Word or not? This is one of the issues raised by our text.

I – Moses

The original people of the Holy Land, *the Canaanites, used a range of techniques in attempts to determine or manipulate the will of their gods* (ABC 235) and to know about the future. Just before our text God prohibited this kind of divination: “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witches, or casts spells, or who is medium or spiritist or who consults the dead... The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so” (vv.9-14). These kinds of practices are very common among the original

religions in Africa and were brought to Brazil by the slaves; it is very common and popular till now.

In an attempt to know the future, people appeal to any kind of divination practices, ignoring that the future belongs to the true God!

The alternative way God gave to His people to reveal Himself was through the prophets. God tried to talk directly to the people at Mount Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments. But the people were terrified, as we read in Exodus 20:18-19: “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.””

Moses was the first great prophet who recorded God’s revelation. God revealed Himself as a God of justice, who punishes the sinner; and as a God of mercy, who forgives those repented and who trust in Him.

Many other prophets came after Moses, both true and false prophets. We have the words of the true prophets recorded in the Bible. The false prophets deceived some people; but they were recognized after a while because of their lie and their prophecies that didn’t come true.

Moses was old and about to die when he wrote this text. God gave him a revelation about a special Prophet that God would send in the future. And Moses shared this revelation with his people:

II – Jesus

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This was understood as

a Messianic Prophecy. People were expecting The Prophet, who would speak on behalf of God, revealing them new things as Moses had given them the Law. When John the Baptist began to preach, some elders came to him and asked him: “Are you the prophet?” But he denied it (John 1:21,25).

When Jesus began to preach, He was acknowledged by His disciples and by the faithful people as The Prophet. When Phillip was called by Jesus to follow him, Phillip immediately found his friend Nathanael and said to him: “We found the one Moses wrote about in the Law – Jesus of Nazareth!” (John 1:45). – When Jesus fed the five thousand, people reacted: “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come to the world” (John 6:14). – Jesus Himself stated to the Jews: “If you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5.46).

Our text was used by the apostles in their first preaching, showing that Jesus was the accomplishment of this prophecy. Peter preached at the temple: “For Moses said, ‘The Lord, your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’” – “Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant (Jesus), he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

III – The Christian Church

Through His apostles and through the Christian Church Jesus secured and secures continuity to his Prophetic Ministry, proclaiming God’s Word. Wherever God’s Word has been preached, there is Jesus, the Prophet, proclaiming the good will of God. Jesus 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).

As when Jesus preached at the synagogue of Capernaum, and was recognized by His authority, even casting out evil spirits, ^(Mark 1:21-28) the authority of Jesus words are still effective, driving out evil spirits from people when they are baptized and when they listen to His words. When the evil spirit has been cast out, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us as in His temple. It is always a miracle when someone comes to faith. Can you explain it when you came to faith? Or when someone of your family came to faith? We cannot explain it. It's God's work. Unfortunately so many people resist the words of The Prophet. We can only pray for them, for a true miracle, and give our good testimony about our faith and what God did and does for us. The promise is repeated twice in our text, followed by a strong warning: "I will raise up for them a prophet ...from among their brothers: I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I commanded him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account" (v.18).

Conclusion: From ancient time God has chosen not to speak directly anymore as He used to speak to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses... "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" ^(Hebrews 1:1,2). Jesus bound His words of love and forgiveness to the Means of Grace, His Word and the Sacraments of the Holy Baptism and of the Holy Communion. It is God Himself coming to us, revealing to us His gracious will, calling us from the wrong and wicked ways to His way of truth and light through His ministers. The pastors are not prophets in the sense of forecasting the future, but in the sense that they preach the Word of God; not our own word, nor what people want to know about their future; but simply: The Word of God: What He did in the past for us when He created us and when He sent His only begotten Son to save us; what He does in the present to us is, showing His love and caring for us; and what His plans for our future are: an eternal life with Him and with all the faithful by the grace of Jesus. Listen to Him to be blessed. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 01 February 2015