

# Who Are the Prophets?

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Mark 6:1-13, Ezekiel 2:1-5**

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Community of Joy Lutheran Church

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I. Who are the prophets?

A. Prophets - like Ezekiel - are generally thought to have some divine calling to be messengers of God's Word. But, I'm not talking about those Biblical prophets that we all know quite well - I'm wondering who the prophets are that are among us now? When I even say the word "prophet" I would imagine that many of us (probably most of us) think of names like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Micah, and maybe even Jonah. Some of us may even recognize these folks as prophets - Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. I would hazard a guess that many of us don't recognize these folks as prophets - Nahum, Haggai, Habakkuk, and Malachi. Those "guys" are not only prophets, but they are names of books of the Bible!

B. I wonder - do we think that prophets ceased to exist when all of the books of the Bible were finally written? Are all of the prophets of the world listed in the Bible - and that's it? Let's define the word "prophet" so we all have a better understanding of this subject. The dictionary says, "One who speaks by divine inspiration or as the interpreter through whom the will of God is expressed." That sounds

pretty heavy and quite theological - doesn't it? Certainly we would all agree that a prophet must have some special education or some miraculous revelation from God - right? Well, the correct answer to that is "no." O.K. then - don't we all understand that not just anyone can go around saying things like, "Thus says the Lord God" - can they? Well, the answer to that question is actually "yes" - they can! As long as people are speaking from their correct knowledge of scripture - the Word of God - then they can say, "Thus says the Lord God." In a way they are just "quoting" or rephrasing the words that God has given us in the form of the Bible. So, let me ask again, "Who are the prophets?" Some of you (I hope) are following me closely enough to realize that the answer to that question is, "We are the prophets!"

C. "We are the prophets?!" I am sure that some of you are already saying to yourselves, "O.K. I know that each of us is to be considered a minister (we are to be involved in the ministry of this church), and we each are also considered to be disciples (followers) of Jesus, but, come on - we are supposed to be prophets as well?!" Let's think about this. Aren't prophets supposed to have long gray hair (and for the men - a long gray beard as well) and some kind of white, flowing robe, **and** the wisdom of Solomon? The answer to that question is a clear "nope!"

D. Listen to the words of a preface to this week's lessons that I found in a "sermon-helping text" that I have, "... in baptism, each Christian has been made a prophet, one who speaks on behalf of God in this time and place." Wow! "Each Christian" - it said - not just the older, wiser, more educated ones. Do you remember little five-year-old Alex Smith? I mentioned him to you two weeks ago in the

sermon called “People of Hope.” Remember what Alex said when asked, “Why do you believe in God?” He said, “I love God the most because God’s really strong and that means God will wash up all my sins and clean up all my messes!” Are those prophetic words? I think so - and they came from a 5-year old!

E. “So, let me get this straight,” you may be saying to yourself right about now. “You’re saying that I should be a minister, a disciple, **and** even a prophet?” Yes! That’s exactly what I am saying - actually that is what the scriptures are telling us. But before we faint from the strain - let’s think about this for a moment. Aren’t all of these tasks (and titles) very similar? If we are each ministers - persons who share the story of Jesus and his love, and if we are disciples - persons who follow the teachings and the example of Jesus - won’t we already be persons who are actually “speaking on behalf of God the Father?” The answer to that is “yes.” It’s just that we current-day Christians still think of prophets as “people who tell the future.”

F. We do not (usually) see ourselves as “future-tellers” - that sounds too much like we would be saying we are “psychics!” The fact is - those persons who are called “prophets” in the Bible were actually “truth-tellers,” and the truth they told often was true for a later time as well. In other words, the statements they made meant something very specific to the people of their time, and (through a miracle of God) it was also interpreted later as having been a “fore-telling” of a future event.

G. It is most likely true that many of us don’t think we have “future-telling powers.” We are still expected to be spokespersons for God here on earth. I have said it before from this pulpit and I’m sure I will say it again - we are God’s hands and feet, God’s eyes and ears

here on earth. Well, this “prophet-thing” just adds - “we are God’s mouth” to that list!

II. We need to realize that there is (what some might call) a “downside” to this “prophet-business.”

A. Prophets often encounter resistance to the messages they proclaim. Jesus had that experience in the gospel text for today (in his own home village). A commentary I have on that text says, “The prophets of God speak with both conviction and compassion. Because prophetic words can threaten the security of even devout people, prophets are often not popular in the church or in the society as a whole.”

B. That doesn’t make this new task sound very inviting - does it? But, as prophets we find strength in God’s grace, and we are able to offer merciful words and actions on behalf of God to many who suffer in our world. But, we must realize that the words we speak as prophets often will fall on the ears of people unwilling to hear them. And that’s O.K. God wants us to do it anyway. We plant the seeds and God takes it from there.

C. The thing is - often we don’t even know that what we are doing is prophetic. Prophetic words can come from some very unlikely sources. About nine years ago I heard a very unlikely “prophet” on the “Evening News With Peter Jennings.” This prophet was an eleven-year-old boy from South Africa. He was infected with AIDS. Because of that infection this 11 year old looked more like he was a 5 or 6 years old child. It seemed very odd to hear such words coming from this boy. He spoke well and was very precocious and he was actually the keynote speaker at the 2000 World Conference on

AIDS. His words reflected the wisdom of God. His prophetic message was quite simple. He said, "We are all the same." He was speaking for the millions of people world-wide who have/had AIDS. His message was clear - actually God's message as spoken by this boy was clear - "We are all the same! Please don't treat us as outcasts. We are all human beings!"

D. The young boy did not preface his remarks with the words, "Thus says the Lord God," but he didn't need to say that. He was speaking for God. He was saying the same thing that Jesus would say about these people if Jesus were here with us today. Certainly we realize that Jesus would have included these people with AIDS in the group that followed him - the group that he ministered to on a daily basis. He included all of those types of people who were considered the "dregs" of his society. He included all of the "outcasts" - all of the people on the fringes of his society. Remember - he included the lepers. The persons with leprosy (in Jesus' time) would have been equivalent to the people with AIDS today.

E. This young South African boy was speaking for God - to us - when he said, "We are all the same!" He was giving us the reminder that we often need as humans - that we are no better (or no worse) than all of God's other human beings. We were - in fact - all created in the image of God! Wow! Just think about that for a moment. God's image must be all inclusive and very diverse. It includes the "normal" or "regular" people of society (as defined by the people of that society), as well as all of those persons who we don't consider "normal." That means the "abnormal" people are included as well! Those who are different in some way are also included. The young South African boy is "different" - he has a scary disease that most

humans do not have. He has a disease that is still (oftentimes) a killer (it killed him), but the message that God sends to us through this young prophet is this - "We are all the same!"

F. I received an e-mail a few years ago that spoke of a "big-God." The story goes like this: A little girl on her way home from church turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me." The mother says, "And why was that?" The girl replies, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" "Yes," replied the mother. "He also said that God lives within us. Is that true?" Again the mother replied, "Yes." "Well," said the girl, "If God is bigger than we are, and God lives in us - wouldn't God show through?" Whoa!! There is another prophetic utterance from a young person! Does God "show through" in our lives? As prophets of God - do we speak words that reflect God's love for all people? Do we say and live things that show (as the boy from South Africa said), "We are all the same?"

G. The Ezekiel reading for today says, "Whether they hear or refuse to hear, ... they shall know that there has been a prophet among them" (Ezekiel 2:5). So, who are the prophets? We are the prophets! I wonder, are we being effective in our "prophet-work?" Can we say, "Whether they hear us or refuse to hear us, they will know that there has been a prophet among them?"

H. Is God showing through us? Let us pray. Lord God, help us to oppose the human desire to put you where we want you, but instead to accept your decision to put us where you want us. Help us to be prophets and let your message show through us. Help us to speak wisely and well about your love for all of humankind. In Christ. Amen.