

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Midweek Advent #1 – December 1st, 2010

Deuteronomy 18:18-19

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. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

Dear Children of God,

In the Old Testament there were three different kinds of leaders that God set up for his people of Israel. There were the prophets who were God's spokespeople to proclaim God's message for his people. There was the High Priest whose main job was to be the leader of the spiritual life of the people, which included offering the sacrifices and being the Mediator between God and his people. And there was the King who was to rule over the people and to protect his people from the enemies.

Each of these people had very distinct roles, and God expected each of the people in their leadership positions to do what they were commanded to. As you look through the Bible you notice a pattern. In most cases, you only were able to work in the capacity of one of these roles of leadership. For instance, you were the King, but you were not a prophet. Or you were a High Priest, but not a King. Their roles were separate, but in the end each of them was responsible to God.

During our Advent Midweek services this year, we are going to look at these offices and realize that there was one person who was each of these offices at the same time. That person was Jesus. So as we look at these Old Testament Offices, we are going to see that each of them was fulfilled through the coming of our Lord and Savior. Today for our First office, we will look at:

Theme: Christ's Office Foretold As A Prophet

- 1. He was like Moses**
- 2. He was full of Truth**

Moses' life was almost over. Israel had come to depend on him. Yes, there had been rough times along the way. More than once they tried to fire him and appoint a new leader, but they discovered that God had chosen Moses, so the matter was not in their hands. Those days were long gone, however. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness had mellowed them. The new generation about to enter the promised land did not remember Egypt. Moses was all they knew. God had sustained and guided them. They had learned reverence and fear of the Lord. God was good to them, but God is holy and not to be taken casually. So Moses was important for them, because Moses was a mediator between God and his people Israel. His death would mark a major transition in the life of the nation and of every individual Israelite.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gave them the law a second time and led them to renew their covenant with God. In the midst of giving various laws, he suddenly gave them a promise from God. God would send them another prophet like Moses. The reason this promise shows up here may be that God had just forbidden sorcery, magic, astrology, divination, seeking oracles from the dead, and all that sort of thing. You see the logic. God does not want them to do these things. They are to worship God alone and look to him alone for guidance in life. As long as Moses is around, why would they look anywhere else? They have the source right there. But once he is gone, they will be tempted to seek guidance from other sources. God's people need guidance. Of course, they had it in the Law. Also, Joshua stepped into Moses' role as leader very well. Still, a prophet like Moses ... the promise comforted them. God would make his will crystal clear by sending a wonder-working, Spirit-filled prophet who would say, "Thus says the Lord!"

Jews have tended to take this promise to mean God would send a succession of inspired prophets, and they see its fulfillment in the string of Old Testament prophets who spoke for God: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and that crowd. The difficulty with this reading, of course, is that there never was another prophet to equal the stature of Moses.

Christians naturally see this promise fulfilled in Jesus. In the first century, when Jesus came preaching and teaching, some Jews believed prophecy had ceased. They had the scriptures. That was all the guidance they needed. Others, however, longed for the return of prophecy and the rise of an authentic prophet. They lived in troubled times. Whom should they follow to do God's will? They wanted proof that after all these years, God had not forgotten them, but was ready to come to their aid. So when John the Baptist appeared and seemed to be like an old time prophet, they flocked to him. They began to hope that God was on the loose once again. Crowds had the same reaction to Jesus. The consensus about him was that he was a prophet. That was the category they already had that they could fit him into easiest. Of course, Jesus has never fit into anyone's categories but his own. Yet the point stands, they were enthusiastic because they wanted a prophet, because life is confusing. Wouldn't it be great to have a charismatic leader who shouts, "Thus says the Lord!" and you know just what to do?

We need a prophet like Moses today. Why? Because we are convinced life is a journey, but we are not sure there is a destination. Talk about wandering in the wilderness! We struggle to find our spiritual roots. These days people change churches frequently. They switch denominations too, sometimes without bothering to inquire what the differences are. I suspect they base their decision on personal taste rather than the soundness of a church's teaching and practice. After all, how do you know which church is closest to the truth? How many people have given up on religion altogether, not because they became convinced God is not there, but because they simply could not sort out all the competing religious messages? Many people don't believe Truth, with a capital T, even exists. But how do they know? How do we judge right from wrong? There are so many voices screaming at us today—religious and secular—about how we ought to live, the things we ought to believe, and the values we ought to hold. How do we sort it out? Wouldn't it be great to have a prophet like Moses? All the clamoring and confusion falls silent in an instant, and clear, pure truth rings out with the force of a bugle call.

Think of what a prophet like Moses would mean to the Christian church—to our denomination and many others. A new Moses could lead us out of our spiritual darkness! We would welcome a prophet like Moses just to end the frustrating debates about what is truth and what is not. Moses explained all that pretty clearly the first time, but perhaps we would listen to a new Moses.

I think every person would welcome a source of pure truth, a place they could turn to find guidance, someone who could give definitive answers to the questions: Who am I? What am I doing here? What does my life mean? Someone to show me who I am and what I am supposed to be and how to find my way through all the tricky decisions that make up my life. Who wouldn't want that? You can understand why most people think it is impossible. It would be too good to be true. So they conclude it is unreasonable to hope for anything like that, instead we just have to muddle through and make our own identity and do the best we can. But that's lonely and hazardous. Like ships with no lighthouse, sooner or later we run a ground.

The good news is: We do have a prophet like Moses: Jesus! Christians have always believed that Jesus uniquely fulfilled God's promise to send another prophet like Moses. You can find this throughout the New Testament. We have the example from John, chapter 6: Jesus miraculously fed a crowd of over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. The people were amazed. They were excited. They knew their scriptures. They saw what this might mean: Jesus just might be the prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy! After all, Moses fed the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness. Here they were, kind of in a wilderness, hungry. And Jesus broke the bread and kept on breaking it until everyone had eaten his or her fill! John says they tried to seize Jesus by force and make him their king.

Jesus was on to them, however. He knew they were only after more bread. So he gave them the slip. Later they found him, and they asked him, "What does God want us to do?" That's exactly the sort of

question an Israelite would ask the prophet like Moses. Jesus told them, “Believe on the one God has sent.” And they said, “OK, sure, but what sign are you going to give us so that we can believe?” They wanted a sign, you see. After all, Moses had given signs. They even suggested a really effective one: “Moses gave our ancestors bread from heaven. Why don’t you do that?” You see their line of reasoning. It’s pretty clear that they think Jesus is the prophet like Moses. They have a category to put him in, a label to stick on him, to understand him by: he’s a new Moses. And they are pleased by that.

But once again, Jesus refuses to fit himself into anyone’s preconceived ideas. He rejects their identification. He scolds them, “Moses did not give your ancestors manna. My Father did! He gives the true bread from heaven.” Well, of course, they want this bread. That’s when he tells them, “I am the Bread of Life.”

Jesus knew that most of them had the picture turned around. He wasn’t Moses. He was the bread. He was the manna. He was the grace-filled, life-giving sustenance from the Father. This they found much harder to accept. Jesus goes way beyond Moses. Yes, he fulfills the promise, but he so surpasses Moses that he shatters the old categories and redefines what they mean. Jesus is the prophet like Moses, but he is so much more. He is nothing less than Almighty God in the flesh. The Word incarnate. The eternal Son of the Father. He is everything Israel hoped for in a prophet like Moses—everything we might dream of too—and much, much more.

The book of Hebrews puts it this way: **“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.”** [1:1-3] Think about it. Most people would be happy if they had a completely trustworthy source of truth and guidance. But that’s not enough! Jesus is much more than a person who informs us how we ought to live. Moses did that. Moses told God’s laws to Israel, “Here is how God wants you to live.” A lot of good it did! When did God’s people ever keep his laws? Rarely if ever! And let’s not point the finger. Jesus has given us plenty of instructions about how to live as God’s people. And do we follow them? Very, very imperfectly. The problem has never been that we did not know what God wants. The problem, rather, has been that we want something else. And that’s a big problem—a rift between God’s will and ours. In this situation we need more than just clear instructions. We need forgiveness, reconciliation, and new hearts. We need grace. We need to be taught who we really are – that we are lost and condemned sinners. We need to be picked up, cleaned off, and restored by our “new Moses”. We need adoption as children of God. And all this is exactly what Jesus does for us!

Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Jesus frees us from slavery to sin and death. Of course, God delivered his people from Egypt. Moses was just his agent. Jesus is more than an agent. Jesus is God, so he did for us what Moses could not have done. He died for us and took our sins. Again we see it: Jesus is like Moses, but even better. Jesus was the perfect prophet who continues to speak to us through his Word and sacraments. Jesus not only gives us the truth. Jesus is the Truth.; His word gives us everything we need to know about God and his will for mankind. Yes, Jesus came and proclaimed the message God’s grace in a perfect way that only Jesus our true prophet could. Yes, Jesus still speaks to us today through his powerful, life-giving Word. Thanks be to God for sending us his Son – the perfect Prophet. Amen