

Sermon Draft

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15–20

Sermon: “More Than a Prophet”

“I know who you are—the Holy One of God,” he said to Jesus (Mark 1:24). True, but spoken by a false prophet, a demon speaking through a poor, helpless victim. *“Be silent, and come out of him!”* (v 25) said the true Prophet, and indeed, the evil spirit came out, because this One always speaks with authority. This Sunday’s epiphany is the revelation of Jesus as the one whose words carry the very power of God. That begins in our Old Testament reading when Moses promises this very Prophet.

Prophet, Priest, and King. Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. Immanuel, God with us. The Messiah. The Christ, the Son of the Living God. Savior.

Jesus is all of these and many, many more titles and honors and offices that Scripture attributes to him. Each of these precious names tells us something special about Jesus, and we need him to be all of these for us.

In our text today, though, our Old Testament Reading from Deuteronomy 18, Moses focuses on one of these rich titles: Prophet. Moses had been God's great prophet to Israel for forty years. He had done exactly what a prophet was to do: deliver God's Word to the people God's Word to leave Egypt, to cross the Red Sea; God's Word of the Ten Commandments; God's Word that he would be faithful to them all those years in the wilderness, even when they were unfaithful to him; and now God's Word to enter the Promised Land. But now, too, Moses would soon die, and the job of prophet was far from finished.

So, God tells Moses to tell the people that he would someday give them another Prophet like Moses. It would turn out, of course, that he was far greater than Moses. This Prophet would be more than a prophet.

God promised to raise up a Prophet like Moses, and in doing so, he raised up a Savior for us.

Our text reads, ***“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore, lest I die’”*** (Deuteronomy 18:15–17).

Christ, who is the Word of God, does what a prophet does: he speaks the Word of God. This fulfills the prophecy that was given to Moses. When Jesus speaks, all the world is affected! Yes, even the demons are affected. Our Gospel shows us this perfectly:

“Immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’” (Mark 1:23–25).

Christ is the ultimate Prophet; he speaks with absolute and divine authority. Therefore, when Christ speaks, he speaks on behalf of his Father and the Father's will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed that the cup of wrath would be taken from him, yet also prayed that the will of the Father would be done.

The will of the Father was done, and the cup did not pass from Jesus. Instead of passing from Jesus, the cup of wrath was poured out onto him, and when he spoke from the cross his last words, all divine authority was behind them, even in his dying breath:

"Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34) and ***"It is finished"*** (John 19:30).

In Jesus' death, we find the fulfillment of the Law of God and the full force of the Law on Jesus for us. In this act, the death and resurrection of Jesus, we attain the Gospel. This is our great inheritance.

Christ as Prophet speaks this inheritance to us in our Baptism. In Baptism, we are forgiven! Holy Baptism is not Law, a work we offer to God; it is Gospel, a work God does to us. And by this work, he gives us the forgiveness of sins! Baptism is not our promise or dedication of ourselves to God; it is God's promise and commitment of himself to us!

Since Baptism is God's Word, which never fails, we are baptized only once! Once is enough! God will never take back those baptismal words, "You are my child!" The flowers fade, the grass withers, but the Word of the Lord stands forever! Christ's strong Word bespeaks us righteous!

Why was Baptism necessary? Romans 8:7–8 states, ***"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*** Furthermore, we were not just sick or injured or blind with sin; we were dead in our sin.

Paul says in Ephesians 2, ***“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”*** (Ephesians 2:1–3).

We need a prophet to tell us all this, but, hearing it, we realize we also need a Savior, one who does the will of God. We need a Savior who could keep the Law of Moses perfectly on our behalf.

For one to fulfill the Law on our behalf, he would have to be perfect and yet one of us in human flesh and blood. Where could we find such a man amid Israel? God spoke to Moses and told him he would raise up a brother from their midst, the line of David, the rod of Jesse, Emmanuel, God among us.

The words that God spoke to Moses were fulfilled when God raised up Jesus, our Brother, from our midst. John begins his Gospel, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”*** (John 1:1–5).

Jesus could not be our Savior if he did not become one of us. What he did not assume, he did not redeem. If Jesus is not fully human but only divine, he could not be our substitute. The opposite is true as well. If he wasn't God, he could not save us. Therefore, we cling to this sacred mystery, confessing that Jesus is true God and true man.

It is this Word of Christ as Savior that he continues to speak to us in Holy Scripture.

Martin Luther's classic hymn "**Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word**" emphasizes how essential this Word is to Christ's ongoing work. What he has accomplished in his death and resurrection benefits us only when we hear of it and believe. Therefore, "**Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done**" (LSB 655:1).

Yet when we confess the Creed, we admit that even the great good news of Christ we cannot believe on our own:

I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but(!) the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. (Small Catechism, Third Article; italics added)

In the Creed, we are admitting that the Holy Spirit brings us into faith with Jesus and that he keeps us in that faith. To us, the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit applies both the Law (that we would be convicted of our sins) and the Gospel (the forgiveness of Christ). Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is eternal life in Christ.

Fortunately, with the Word of Christ always comes the Holy Spirit, who calls us and gives us faith to cling to salvation. Thus, we sing further with Luther: ***“O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life”*** (LSB 655:3).

Against all opposition in this world, the Church of Christ stands firm by the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us that which we need most.

By the Word of Christ, he preserves us in the very faith he gives us. For this, Christians must be deeply thankful! And we pray that the Holy Spirit would increase confidence in us daily.

When God speaks, the world changes. When Christ speaks, the ears of demons perk up, and they are forced to obey. When Christ speaks his final words from the cross, our redemption is accomplished, and we are forgiven. When Christ speaks our name in Baptism, we become a Christian with faith. And the Holy Spirit keeps us in that faith as Christ speaks to us his Word in the liturgy, sermon, and altar.

God raised the great Prophet, Christ, from the midst of brothers, as he is true man. Christ perfectly kept the Law for our sake, as he is true God. Christ speaks with the authority given to him by the Father. But also, as our Savior, Christ takes that authority to the cross and dies for us. And even now, he speaks with this authority, saying, **“You are my sisters and brothers forever.”**

Amen