

Pastor's Corner 8-17-2025:

Prophet has always been this strange class to me. So many people line up to claim the mantel prophet. Cultural prophet, moral prophet, financial prophet, they line up in almost every sphere of human activity. And they line up with a complete misunderstanding of the call. I suppose the biggest thing that gets attached to the idea of a prophet is some kind of future predictor. There is also some romantic ideal of standing athwart some all powerful leviathan long locks blowing in the breeze. But that is a huge misunderstanding of the gig. The definition of the prophet is the one who speaks the Word of the Lord.

Our Old Testament Lesson of the day (Jeremiah 23:16-29) wants to draw some clear lines. And they are lines that resonate down to us. On the one side of the line are the false prophets. And those false prophets have two modes of speech. The first is to substitute their own plans for the Word of God. ‘They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:16).’ The second is to dull the conscience of those who are listening. ‘They say continually to those who despise the Word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you (Jeremiah 23:17).’”

What is the purpose of each of those modes of speech? The second is that each of us has had the law written on our hearts. Over time we can callous our hearts and make them hard, but we have a natural reaction to sin and evil – to jumping the curb of the law. We know that sin stores up wrath. But because we want to go on sinning, we collect people who will tell us “No disaster shall come upon you (Jeremiah 23:17).” We want to find those voices who will affirm us. The first mode is more complicated. What is the point of listening to someone else’s dream? Yes, we might buy into it. But I think the point God reveals a bit later, “who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another (Jeremiah 23:27).” Mankind lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And if you turn away from that meat, you replace it with junk food. Even the absence would remind us of the Word. So to forget it, we find other dreams.

The false prophet’s gig is to run out your clock and make you forget the Word. Contrary to this the prophet speaks the Word. “If they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds (Jeremiah 23:22).” The Word of the LORD does not return empty. It carries out what it intends. And the results of the false prophet and the authentic prophet are compared to straw and wheat (probably better translated chaff and grain.) The Word of the prophet is true spiritual food. That of the false prophet only fit for the fire. “And is not my word like fire, declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:29).” The works of all will be revealed in due time. Don’t get caught on the wrong side of that line.

Jesus the prophet – heard in the Gospel lesson (Luke 12:49-56) – picks up on that. “I came to cast fire on the earth.” The very WORD has come. And that WORD causes the division. Do we yearn for affirmation of our ways? Which will never come. Or do we hear the absolution and turn from our ways toward the ways of the Lord? The prophet is more Firestarter than romantic hero. Be careful if you see a lineup of people wanting the gig.