Springfield Presbyterian Church

January 30th, 2021

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

In Search of a Modern Day Prophet

1. Finding Christ

You may have heard of the Rev. Eugene Peterson, a PC(USA) pastor who served in Bel Air,

Maryland, but is probably best known for his 10-year project called ‘The Message’ which seeks to put the Bible in modern day language. In one of his writings, he shares this wisdom, “The only opportunity you will ever have to live by faith is in the circumstances you are provided this very day: the house you live in, this family you find yourself in, this job you have been given, the weather conditions that prevail at the moment.”

 I found this to be a good reality check as I read from our text this morning. Moses, a prophet, worked in his circumstances. He worked with what he had – he worked in the context of the people, his voice quaked as he shared the Word of God, and he relied on God to guide him. While the circumstances have changed tremendously since Moses’ time, Peterson’s viewpoint grounds us in the reality that just as Moses worked in his circumstances, we are called to do the same.

 It’s great to have all the technology in the world, education at your fingertips, and all you need provided, but we do not have to wait for our idea of perceived perfection to become disciples of Christ. God has, does, and will always provide – it may not be the circumstances we wish, but God is calling us in this time and place to speak truth, to witness to the Spirit’s movement in this world, and to humbly offer ourselves to listen to God speaking in the here and now.

 You and I may not think that Sykesville in Carroll County is the place of prophets – but honestly, hasn’t God doesn’t stranger things? God took Moses, who stuttered, and made him the mouthpiece of Israel. God took Abraham and Sarah, two elders, and gave them a child of promise. God took the disciples, who to say the least, were well-meaning, but also human and not faultless.

 So, why would it be crazy for God to be doing his good work, right here, right now, in your home, in your life, in your family, and in your job? If you think you don’t have enough knowledge or charisma, think about those in Scripture and those in our Christian history who had neither and crafted the future that we are now living in. In you and me, there might be a little bit of prophet – a word to speak to bless God and move God’s Kingdom into reality here on Earth.

1. False Prophets

Now, we are warned here in the text and in other places in Scripture as well that we have to be careful of false prophets. To be quite honest, sometimes this is no easy task. If we see folks who are lifting themselves up, proclaiming they are God, or are proclaiming what they want for their desires to be met – then it’s pretty easy to say that they are false prophets. But what about the cunning leaders, those who speak words that sound Christ-like, but it turns out, it’s a false narrative? These are the kind of leaders that we see leading cults – and unfortunately, for those followers, it’s too often in hindsight that they find out that the leader they were faithful to was actually pocketing their own desires or seeking glory for themselves.

 So where have all the true prophets gone? If we need the Word of God, we need it today – and sometimes this world feels so directionless. Especially when there’s been the chaos of government, anxiety enters in as we learn how to rely on God more than our esteemed leaders. Sometimes we felt like our feet were taken out from under us and as we sit dazed on the ground, we look up for some good news.

 Can there be a Word stirring in you or in me? Absolutely. We are true prophets, true disciples, and true proclaimers of the Word if we lean into humility and faithfully seek to listen to God’s voice. You may be sitting there, saying – but I don’t have everything I need. But yes, yes you do. It might not feel that way, but just by being a beloved child of God who is willing to listen, you’re already well underway for the Spirit to speak.

1. Bold Prophecy

This past week, there was an image going around Facebook with the now famous ‘Bernie-

meme’ with his hands crossed and serious looking – that image was used and someone wrote the text, “What a Presbyterian Looks Like When They Feel the Spirit Moving.” And rather than get offended, I had a good laugh, and I hope you do too – because it’s good to be able to not take yourself too seriously all the time.

 But the image had a biting truth – Presbyterians aren’t necessarily known for their proclamation on the streets, their on-point rhythm clapping to a praise song, or until this year purely out of circumstance – virtual worship. That’s just not who we are and to some extent – that’s OK – we have lots of great attributes and a great heritage that we build on. But, maybe, just maybe, we can lean a little more into the discomfort.

 What would it look like for you or for me to speak what we hear God sharing with us in our prayers aloud? It takes vulnerability, it takes courage, and it takes a risk that this sharing might not heed the results we thought it would. But what if we kept the good news from our prayer and the movement of the Spirit, and instead of bottling that up – what if we shared it in the safety of community? What if we trusted and just risked seeing how it would be received?

 The reason I urge you to lean into the discomfort is that being a disciple is not only about words, but it’s about living out a faith that is daring, somewhat uncomfortable, and dancing on the fringes of what our modern day society would tell us is right or wrong. If you want to look at the truest prophet of them all – Jesus Christ – you see him consistently going against the grain, walking with people that are not in prominent social circles, and speaking words that frankly don’t go over really well with the majority. If you need an example of true prophecy, a true following of God – Jesus Christ is your ultimate example.

1. So Go.

So, I encourage you to shake out your arms and legs, to breathe a bit deeper and to calm

anxious hearts. And then, listen – listen closely, listen carefully – in humility and grace, seeking to honor God – listen for what God wants you to do in these very circumstances he has given you. And then, here’s the key – after listening…go – speak it aloud – if it’s at the dinner table or around a classroom or wherever you are planted. And know that you won’t be called as a disciple to prophetic action week in and week out, perhaps the action comes infrequently, but I charge you to listen for it and then to follow. May you know, that as you seek to do this daring, loving, and disciple-led action of prophecy – may you feel the love of God that supports you, the Christ that teaches you, and the Spirit that moves you. Amen.