

8th Sunday After Trinity
Vicar Anderson | July 24th – 25th, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Heavenly Father, we thank you for the knowledge of your Word through your Son Jesus Christ, who came into the world as the Word made flesh as our True Prophet. Thank you for what Your Son did for us in His life and death and now through the work of the Holy Spirit we can discern correctly between false prophets and true prophets. We pray that you help us always hold fast to the truth of your Word and guard us against all false prophets until life everlasting. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

“15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

“Watch out,” “Beware,” “Be on alert.” Today’s text begins with a sharp warning. It takes place near the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and He emphasizes for us the need to watch out for false prophets. Jesus knew that a time would come, and soon that prophets and teachers would rise up and teach falsely. They would misuse the teachings of Jesus and offer different ways of obtaining salvation.

We know from scripture that a prophet is anyone who proclaims the divine message of salvation. They are those who bring the good news or Gospel to those in need of it. A false prophet is someone who claims to be a prophet, but has failed at his primary duty, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. Most of us can think of someone either in the bible or in our world today who believes incorrectly, but what about a false prophet, a person who preaches a false version of the Word of God?

Many times they are hard to recognize. They blend in and slowly creep into our circles and into our churches. They come to us **“in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** How

can we know whether a prophet is true or false? Jesus says we will “recognize them by their fruits.” False prophets produce bad fruit and true prophets produce good fruit.

I False Prophets Produce Bad Fruit

What Jesus is warning us to watch out for is not those who believe in false doctrine, but those who preach false doctrine. He is warning us against false prophets who preach His Word to His followers. He is referring to the content of the prophet’s message not their outward deeds. Jesus knows that those who claim to preach the truth are the most threatening to us because what they claim to preach is not what is important. What matters is whether or not their preaching actually lines up with God’s Word.

False prophets manipulate God’s Word in order to satisfy their own desires and cause followers of Christ to stumble and fall. They describe a different Jesus than the one you and I know and put our trust in. They change His Word in order to satisfy a personal agenda of their own, adding or subtracting to His Word. People are susceptible to this, and the devil knows it. He knows what we want to hear. What we want and think we need in our lives are what the devil attacks and exploits and he uses false prophets to lead God’s sheep astray.

It is natural for us to be attracted to a different kind of teaching. Because of our sinful nature we would rather strive and take credit for our good works than to completely surrender and accept it solely by grace through faith. Positive reinforcement is a powerful thing. We like to be told, “good job,” “well done,” “thank you.” In fact many of us could never be told this enough, we crave it far too much.

It is difficult for us to do something completely out of the kindness of our heart, not expecting anything in return; we would rather be recognized for it. In this same way we can sabotage the great gift of salvation given to us by our loving Father through our precious Savior. We make it out to be more than a gift. Our reason tells us it can’t be that simple. We want to take some credit. There has to be something I can do to attain it.

When someone comes to us and offers a salvation by our own works, it can sound awfully tempting to us. Wait, you’re telling me if I spend more time in prayer God will be more likely to bless me with good things? If I give more to the church God will be happier with me and will listen to my prayer more? If I do my part God will do His.

These are a few ways false prophets pollute God’s Word in order to tempt us and entice us away from the truth. They replace Christ by inserting something else, twisting the truth of scripture. False prophets offer a path that leads to destruction, and in a few verses prior to our text, Jesus says, **“many enter by the wide gate to destruction” (Matt. 7:13)**. False prophets can only offer worthless bad fruit that leads to death. Jesus would have us flee from this kind of teaching as fast as we possibly can.

Where the truth of God’s Holy Word is being taught –like in this church– the devil will work extra hard to destroy it. He will come using every technique and force possible to squirm and wiggle his way into the church. If he can use a Pastor or even a Vicar to do his bidding he will gladly do it.

St. Paul describes false prophets that the devil uses to do great harm to the church like this, **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13–15)**. No church body is completely safe, and it will always be this way; false prophets can even find their way into the ELS Synod. Jesus warns you to “watch out, beware!”

But, how can we beware of a false prophet if we don’t know what they look like? How do we recognize them?

Jesus describes them as **“coming to us in sheep’s clothing,”** disguised as sheep means that they would appear to be like one of us. They would seem to be a follower of Christ and someone who lives a relatively moral life. They would be kind to us and show us that they care about us. They would help others and give to others.

Jesus does not say you can know them by their works. If we could know them this way He wouldn’t have said, **“many will say “Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out devils and perform miracles in your name?” (Matt 7:22)** False prophets appear to do good works in His name, and appear to be good leaders who we think we can trust. We are deceived by what we see on the outside.

Instead Jesus says to identify false prophets by what they teach. He says, **“you shall know them by their fruits.”** We can know them by what comes out of their mouths. Are their words in accordance with God’s Holy Word? Can any false doctrine be found in their teaching? False doctrine equals false prophet. God’s Word is like a measuring rod testing whether or not what someone says is true.

Many false prophets confess that Jesus is the Savior and the only way to heaven, but they will dilute and minimize this doctrine and other teachings of scripture. The entirety of God’s Word both His Law and saving Gospel are the full counsel of God, and if anyone takes away or adds to God’s Word then it no longer can produce good fruit.

A key question to ask ourselves is, “what are they pointing us to?” or more accurately, “whom are they pointing us to?” If they point us to anything but Christ for the answer to our weary souls, then they are a false prophet. Let us all be on our guard against false prophets.

Thankfully there are also true prophets among us, who teach and hold fast to the purity of God’s holy Word.

II True Prophets Produce Good Fruit

The true prophets of old pointed to Christ. They prophesied about the coming of the Messiah the deliverer and Savior of His people from sin and death. They pointed to Jesus Christ the True Prophet, the one who would come and prophesy about Himself. This prophet taught people who He was and what He had come to do. He prophesied that He had come to give all people a way out of sin and darkness, into the light of salvation. He revealed to people that all other true

prophets pointed towards Him. All that these prophets had foretold about Him would come true through His perfect life and atoning death.

His atoning death is not for those who think they are owed it or deserve it. You and I don't deserve to go to heaven. We have often ignored God's Word and followed the voices we wanted to listen to, the voices of false prophets leading us away from Jesus. We didn't think it would be so bad, but it was. We know how often we have failed to beware and be watchful.

Jesus had many voices around Him accusing Him of blasphemy and being a false prophet. The True Prophet, the prophet above all prophets was labeled a false prophet....a liar. He was attacked verbally and physically and convicted on false charges, which led to a death only reserved for the most evil and vile offenders.

And still, through all of this He never wavered in His task. Jesus lived a life completely sinless for you, a life that you cannot possibly live. He was never enchanted by any of the false prophets around Him. He died in perfect obedience to the will of His Father. He did this selflessly and out of His great love for you, so all of your sins of weakness and pride would be blotted out.

This is the heart of your Lutheran faith. **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2: 8-9).** We cannot take credit for our salvation because this would be a denial of the truth. A denial of what God's Word teaches. Christ entered into the world as a gift from our Father in heaven and saved us apart from any work of our own.

And He is with you now continuing to bring you the blessings of His perfect life and sacrificial death. He gives you His holy body and blood. The righteousness and forgiveness of God placed in your mouth in the Lord's Supper. He graciously comes to nourish you and give you the strength to fend off all false prophets and any false doctrine.

Jesus has appointed prophets to administer these gifts through His means of grace. He still calls faithful pastors to preach God's Word in sermons and administer the Sacraments to you. Men bring you the truth of God's Word and do not add or subtract from it. They baptize in the name of the triune God and give you the true body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

The Holy Spirit works through the words of these men to bring to you the good fruits of Christ's atoning work, bringing you comfort and strengthening your faith. The Lord will continue to come to you this way until you dine at His side at the eternal feast in heaven.

Our gracious Father has given us His means of grace, and because of this we can now recognize false prophets and stand firm against them. Christ came as the Word incarnate to show us the true way to salvation, and through Him we have life everlasting. Thanks be to God that He has given us His truth by providing us with His holy Word.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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