

Sermon, 9eme Trinite, August 6, 2023.

At Yutz with Thionville attending, congregations of UEPAL

Pastor Viking Dietrich of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The theme that was given to today's texts by your church is the theme of spiritual gifts. The texts lead us to consider the prophetic voice, and in particular the call to each of us to be a prophetic voice in the community. For us to realize our role as prophets, we are given spiritual gifts, and especially the gift of discernment. In today's sermon, I would like to explore what it means to be a prophet, and how do we express this voice as a community?

- **Que les paroles de ma bouche et la méditation de mon coeur soient agréables devant toi, ô Éternel, mon rocher et mon rédempteur!**

When I was in seminary, my homiletics professor told us not to move so quickly to think about what a text means for other people, but to spend time thinking about what the text says to us personally.

- What do these texts say to me?
- My first thought was that I could relate to Jeremie, who thought he was just a boy, that he couldn't speak, that he didn't have the right words, wouldn't know what to say.
- Well, this is the first sermon I have given in French in 15 years.
- And I come to it with great fear, that I won't know how to express myself in French.
- How can I speak effectively, won't I speak like a child!
- How can I dare think of myself as someone like Jeremie, a prophet.

But let us agree that this text is not just about me.

- In fact, we are all called to be a prophetic voice?
- And I am sure you have the same self-doubts as I do.
- Like Moses, suddenly standing in front of a burning bush, being told to go speak on God's behalf, and Moses stuttering, responding, "how can I", "who am I?"

So what is a prophet?

- Simply, someone who tells people to return to God, to repent, to be faithful
- Also, someone who is empowered to do this by God
- Popular idea: someone who sees the future.
 - o Not really. Unless we agree that God is our future.
 - o Then a call to return to God might be considered to be a call to the future.
- Fundamentally, a prophet is someone who asks the people of the community – friends, family, neighbors: the society – to return to the way of God in our daily life, in our daily actions.
 - o That is to return to the two great commandments of God.

We all know the two great commandments:

- When asked by the Pharisees what is the greatest commandment, Jesus responded with a verse from Deuteronomy, saying:
 - o **Tu aimeras le Seigneur ton Dieu de tout ton cœur, de toute ton âme et de tout ton esprit. Voilà le grand, le premier commandement.**
 - o **Et le second lui est semblable : Tu aimeras ton prochain comme toi-même. De ces deux commandements dépend toute la Loi, ainsi que les Prophètes. »**

First, The prophet calls the community to return to God, to devotion to God.

- In the gospel lesson we heard today from Matthew, we hear two short parables describing the faithful servant of God.

- The one who gives up everything for that one field with that one treasure
- The one who gives up everything for that one fine pearl.
- In the wisdom of this world, one says we should not put all our eggs in one basket, but in contradiction to this worldly wisdom, God educates us to give our all to God, to be totally, one hundred percent faithful
- That is, to remember God in all that we do,
 - to be conscious of his presence at all times is a saving grace
 - Not become arrogant, thinking we are relying on ourselves
 - Not become desperate, thinking we are relying on ourselves
 - For us, as Christians, we have a resurrection understand of this presence
 - Not only is God the creator near to us, creating and re-creating,
 - But in the risen Christ, the redeeming power of his Word and Promise is among us
 - And the Holy Spirit has been given to us as guide and comforter.
- Are we ready to for this first task of the prophet: to encourage one another to be aware of God's presence at all times, and to give our complete devotion to God.

Secondly, the prophet calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

- To look out for one another, to put others' interests even before our own
- Seems to me, that more and more, people are looking out for themselves, "
 - "me first" "what's in it for me" "how does it effect my interests"
 - ---- But maybe it has always been this way, maybe we are even better at this than before. This ego-centricism is one of the most poignant characteristics of fallen humanity
- But we hear the call to love our neighbor
 - – not romantic love, but agape love – to give of oneself for the sake of the other
 - I would like to mention just two dimensions, there are more, of what it means to give of oneself for the other
 - To care for the poor, "priority for the poor" - This is a measure of our morality
 - – how do I, and how does my society care for the poor
 - Physically poor, economically poor, spiritually poor – those who are in need
 - To seek justice for those suffering injustice.
 - Two weeks ago my wife and I visited the concentration camp at Auschwitz.
 - During that terrible event in human history, how many looked to their own interests and did not do all they could to stop the injustices that were occurring.
 - Both of these – caring for the poor, seeking justice - are actions, love is an action!

Seeking justice and caring for the poor in today's society opens up a lot of questions.

- What is justice? Who is suffering injustice? Who is poor? Why are they poor? Politics!!
- When we speak of these things, it is easy to find opposition, even anger
 - Some people believe we should never talk politics
- Last week, I was talking with my cousin who grew up in East Germany,
 - He shared how difficult it was to share opinions, there were reprisals
- Bonhoeffer – students in Finkenwalde – "La vie ensemble"
 - Concern for the safety of his students
 - Spoke to them about choosing silence to avoid persecution.
- The need for discernment for what to say and when to say it and to whom?

We all know the story of Solomon and the two women who argued over the child.

- Two women with infants the same age. One of the infants died, and the mother went to the room where the second mother was sleeping, and exchange the babies. They argued over whose baby was the one living.

- Did you know, that just prior to this story, Solomon, who we call Solomon the Wise, had a dream in which he prayed for the gift of discernment
 - **Donne à ton serviteur un cœur attentif pour qu'il sache gouverner ton peuple et discerner le bien et le mal ; sans cela, comment gouverner ton peuple, qui est si important ? »**

Despite our fallenness, our humanity, God calls us to be prophets to the nations

- Of course as humans, we can always be in error
 - And so we approach this with humility
 - Solomon prayed that he would be attentive, that he would listen
 - Paul, wrote (in our text today) that he certainly has not yet obtained it, that he has not obtained perfection, but that he presses on in the grace of God.
 - Bonhoeffer, too, asked his students to listen and meditate before acting
 - Be attentive to the prophetic word that come from outside us
 - Be open to our own personal growth.
- But even in our imperfection, God calls us to act on behalf of others and to be a prophetic voice to the nations
 - This means that you matter to God, your thoughts, your feelings, your perceptions, all of these can be used for God's purposes
 - In Paul's vision of spiritual gifts, we are not alone. We are part of a community
 - Not that one person gets one gift and another person gets a different gift
 - But we all get a little of all of the gifts
 - Faithful discernment is done in the community
 - It isn't just me and my way!
 - It is with prayerful conversation
 - Talking honestly about our feelings and perspectives
 - Listening attentively to the feelings and thought of others
 - Regarding our own voice with humility
 - Regarding the voice of others with grace and embrace
 - In this way, difficult questions for a community lead not to division but to a stronger mutual understanding
 - In this way, God sharpens its message of the church, God guides our voices

Let us all pray to God for a portion of the spiritual gift of discernment. Let us pray that our thoughts lead to speech, lead to action in this world. That this action be according to God's will, God's vision for humanity. That those suffering injustice will find relief, that all who are in poverty will be fulfilled.