

## “A Word Not Spoken”

Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
May 31, 2015

**New Testament Lesson:** Acts 5:33-40

**Old Testament Lesson:** Deuteronomy 18:9, 13-15, 19-22

**Truth with A Capital T** – a poem.

I went to church, it wasn't there;  
No freedom which it gives.  
No one has power to have no care.  
This freedom doesn't live.

To see the Truth that forever lives;  
That lives in all that is,  
I had to look inside myself.  
This home is truly His.

I went inside and probed the walls,  
To find out what was there.  
I glimpsed the Truth, my life's drive,  
By this, I'm led to care.

I pray and hope, to God, we find  
This truth that never dies;  
The truth that's judged so nobly,  
Only in His eyes.

I wrote that poem, at age 20, for a creative writing course in college. Apart from God, there is no Truth with a capital T. That's what God is saying to us in our Old Testament lesson today. Among all the messages we encounter in life, some are true – as if spoken directly by God – and some are not. Our challenge is to know which is which.

Today we begin our Summer Forum on the Prophets of the Old Testament; you'll find them gathered in the Parlour immediately following worship – not the actual prophets, but a group of us talking about the prophets.

What is a prophet? Prophets are not soothsayers and diviners, as scripture says, but rather truth-tellers. In fact, Deuteronomy says that certain people (quote) “do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, (but) as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so” – to listen to such people. We are not permitted to give ourselves over to the charlatans – the fakes, the frauds, the pretenders – of our day.

These are the people who try to sell us something against our better judgment, whether that's the wrong kind of food to eat – maybe fast food; the wrong kind of activities to engage in – such as drinking or smoking or any other compulsive habit; or the wrong kind of politician to vote for – think 2016, it's coming, you know, another big campaign year. Lots of false prophets to weed through.

And then, of course, there are our friends, family members, and people we meet on the street who can also lead us astray if we are not careful. How do we know who to listen to these days!?! That's a problem.

Thankfully, God gives us a way of knowing who to listen to, who is a true prophet – a faithful truth teller – rather than a false prophet, someone leading us astray. God says, "... Any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak – that prophet shall die."

Now I'm not saying your friends who lie to you or lead you astray will die. God's not saying that, either as best I can tell. But what God is saying is that, at the very least, these false utterances and declarations will die. Which is another way of saying that the truth – Truth with a capital T – will triumph over falsehood. God says, "You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?'" – that is, a word from a false prophet. How do we know who to believe, who to follow?

"If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD," says God, "but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it."

We don't have to worry about all those people in this world who would lead us down the wrong path. Their words will die on the vine, unless, that is, we feed into what they are saying. When we allow ourselves to feed into what we know is wrong, than we breathe life into that which God would let die. Maybe someone at school or at work wants you to cheat for them or for yourself – don't feed into that!

Maybe the TV is telling you you need this or that or the other thing to be happy, beautiful, or successful – don't feed into that. Maybe it's even your spouse or boyfriend or girlfriend; your brother or sister or best friend in all the world telling you something you just know is wrong – don't feed into it. Don't feed into it for your sake, and don't feed into it for the sake of the other person.

What does God say will happen to us when we go along with something that we know is wrong, or conversely, fail to follow God's leading when we hear a righteous word? "Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name," says God, "I myself will hold accountable." God holds us accountable when we fail to recognize, follow, and promote the truth when we hear it. Or as Holy Scripture says in Galatians, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow." If we make it a habit of feeding into things we know are wrong, things that do not stand the test of time under the righteous judgment of God, than we deserve what we get.

Oh, God is still there for us – grace and mercy do indeed abound! But we play that game of half truths and deception at our own peril. While it is my faithful hope and assurance that God in God’s time will redeem all creation – all people – I’m equally convinced that it ain’t no fun in the meantime, living opposed to God. Not really, not truthfully.

It may seem like fun at the time. It may seem fun to do drugs, abuse alcohol, or engage in casual sex. It may seem like cheating will get you ahead in life, that we ought to always be angling to get our own way, that taking the easy way out is the way to go – it may seem fun and rewarding at the time. But in the end, it never works out well, does it?

When we follow a false prophet in life, we know it’s not going to end well. We know this by experience, and we know this by the nature of prophecy, of truth. “Prophecy is not the result of seeing into the future,” says writer Bob Hulteen.<sup>1</sup> “Instead, prophecy is the faithful declaration of the implications of current actions on the future....”

In other words, prophesy is more closely related to common sense than it is to extrasensory perception. We are all capable of prophesy. We are all capable to being a prophet – a truth teller – to one another and to ourselves. We are all capable of looking down the road in life and seeing an impending train wreck coming our way, or heading for someone we know and love.

The question is, who do we listen to; do we listen to the inner voice of the prophet – that inner truth teller, that voice of God. Or do we listen to a different voice – the voice of popular opinion, the voice of easy money, the voice of cutting corners.

And if it’s the latter, if it’s a voice contrary to the will of God that we are listening to, why do we do that?!? Fear, that’s why. We are afraid of not being “cool,” afraid of missing out, afraid of not succeeding – that’s what has us follow the crowd; try to get something for nothing, and just plain cut corners in life. And God has an answer for that, too!

When God says, “I myself will hold accountable ... anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak,” anyone who turns away from the truth, from what’s right – when God says that, God is giving us the power to choose right in the face of wrong, truth amid an onslaught of lies and deceptions. By holding us accountable, God empowers us.

If we were to take the fear of not being cool, the fear of missing out, the fear of putting in a little extra – if we were to take those fears and put them up against our faith in God, well then, our choice to do what is right would be so much easier. It just has to do with what you trust more, fear or faith. When it comes right down to it, it’s not what the world thinks of you that matters. Rather, it’s what you think of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Hulteen, “Once a Millennium,” Sojourners, July-August 1998, 65.

Do you – do I – trust in God enough to turn away from temptation and instead follow the way of Jesus – the truth, the way, and the life?

As you think about that question, where your faith really lies in the world or in God? Keep in mind that it's not just God we have to have faith in, but also ourselves. William Sloane Coffin puts it this way in his book title "The Courage to Love:"<sup>2</sup> "Fear distorts truth, not by exaggerating the ills of the world ... but by underestimating our ability to deal with them ...."

So the question is do you – do I – trust God enough to risk whatever the world might throw at us if it means drawing closer to God? And if it is the truth you seek, then ask yourself, right now, who are the truth tellers in your life – in my life. And are we – you and me as individuals – willing to listen, to the truth, and then act on it, act on God's word, not in fear, but in faith. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Holy God, living Savior, ever-present Spirit, from you we receive life and hope and love. You work to unite heaven and earth in a single peace, in a oneness that mirrors your own.

Banish from us all doubt and fear that we may grow in unity and love. Help us know and delight in you, as you know and delight in us.

Keep us steadfast in faith and worship, constant in prayer, and joyous in giving ourselves in service to you, in ways both large and small, knowing that our greatest act of service is our worship of you, O God. All else flows from that.

We pray this day for those in need of your comfort and care. For the people of Texas and Oklahoma struggling to recover from recent flooding, and especially for those lost in the storm, and their families.

We pray for those closer to home, those people we know of who are in need of your healing touch, your spirit of hope and encouragement, your ability to provide where need exists.

And we pray for ourselves, that we might continue to be instruments of healing, hope and provision, even as we receive these from you through those around us.

Receive our prayers, O God, in the name of the greatest gift the world has ever know, Jesus Christ, your son, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive  
our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**

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<sup>2</sup> William Sloane Coffin, *The Courage to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 60.