

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
8th Sunday after Trinity**

Text: Matthew 7: 15-23

Theme: *Sorting out Dreamers from the True Prophets of God*

Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. (Jer. 23:28)

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. (Matt. 7:15-16)

About seven hundred years before the prophet Jeremiah was sent to call Judah to repentance or face the destruction God would bring at the hands of the Babylonians, Moses summarized the covenant of Law as the Israelites camped by the waters of the Jordan River. Moses promised for those who would place themselves under the Law great temporal rewards for keeping its provisions but terrible punishments if they did not. To the question then put to them; *who's in?* Almost everyone's hand went up with shouts of *count us in*. We are going to keep the covenant and receive the manifold blessings from God as He has promised. They were dreamers. For as they sloshed jubilantly into the promised land, God had them singing a prophetic song that foretold their own disobedience and God's harsh punishments as their lot. Thus said the Lord: they would *not* be keeping the covenant. Over the course of the following centuries as the punishments would come from God for their continual disobedience, the Israelites would cry for God to be merciful and give them another chance. They will do better next time. And God would be merciful and give them another chance - and another, and another, and so on.

Now, we come to the time of Jeremiah and the impending judgment of God that he proclaimed. There were dreamers who spoke of dreams that saw God's people being sufficiently obedient to be receiving all of the elusive blessings that had escaped them most of the time in their history. The dreamers had a vision of a renewed people of God who could finally commit to an obedience to God that would bring God's favor and blessing. They dreamt that they could be faithful to its provisions and get the good life that God promised to those who would fulfill its demands. They also advanced the notion that since God was the one who gave the Law and linked blessings and curses to it - it was God who was the true source of the vision. So about their vision they said *thus says the Lord!* They were not true prophets of the Lord. They were dreamers!

Secondly, The dreamers in Jeremiah's day presented a vision of the God of Israel which was not so much fatherly, as grand-fatherly. They portrayed God as a sentimental sort who would look down upon his people's *general* observance and obedience to His precepts and think to Himself: *My people have not fully complied with my precepts. They have not loved me with their whole heart, mind and soul. Yes, there*

has been some idolatry and false worship among my people and social injustice is often present But, generally speaking, they have done pretty well on most of my 519 Laws. I will favor them and grant them peace and blessings - because they have worked so hard, they were sincere, and they did the best they could. I do not want to let them down in the midst of a difficult situation in the world with the might of the Babylonian Empire threatening them. And about this also they said, Thus says the Lord Dreamers!

And Jesus said, beware of false prophets. They appear as sheep but are really ravenous wolves who proclaim a false but attractive word that comes from their own visions and not from God. The vision is always the same. God has more blessings that you have been receiving. However, if you will just bring your life into greater conformity with His will as prescribed in His holy Law, you can enjoy a greater measure of his blessings rather than the rotten things in life that you are now having to experience. Such was proclaimed in the Name of God in Jeremiah's day, during Jesus' ministry, and down through the ages in the life of the Church. It is the most popular message we can hear today also in religious literature. God's favor and blessing can be achieved by improving your obedience to His commandments. He will give you another chance and with sincerity and commitment on your part, He will overcome your adversities and give you more blessings.

The message is from false prophets who are dreamers. There is no favor that can be gained from God through the Law of Moses. As St. Paul says: *For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written; cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.* (Gal. 3: 10) The message of God's impending curses and punishments was the message God gave to His people right from the start of the Old Covenant with the Song the people were made to sing. It was God's prophecy that the covenant of Law would not bring God's blessings regardless of how many chances are given. No amount of renewed effort can bring about compliance to its demands. The purpose of the Law is to reveal the curse that Paul describes. God's favor requires obedience, but the Law brings only a curse of God's judgment to reveal and crush us under the might of our sinful condition - a sinful condition that cannot be overcome with more chances to improve. Such thinking is a dream and those who proclaim it are false prophets.

The dreamers and false prophets always falsely imagine God's mercy as giving us more chances to live godly lives. And they imagine that we can secure God's favor by a great commitment and effort to keep the precepts of His Law. They are to be recognized for what they are and distinguished from the true prophets by testing their fruits. Such preaching does not work repentance and it does not work faith in the righteousness of Christ. It produces the bad fruit of either self-righteousness - *I'm doing OK for God's favor*, or Despair - *I can never measure up and have favor with God*. Both perspectives are like ravenous wolves that consume a healthy faith life in Christ.

The true prophet is one that passes muster as did the Apostle Paul to the Berean Church - a prophet that proclaims a word from God that is in accord with the Scriptures. This is the word that proclaims an obedience of faith that clings to the righteousness of Christ as the perfect fulfillment of the Law to enjoy the favor of God forever. This is the Word that proclaims the mercy of God as not giving you more chances but giving you the complete forgiveness of your sins now and forever. Let the prophets of the Lord today proclaim this as the true prophets who have gone before us have done. And as the people of God let us join with the great cloud of witnesses and listen to them - let us listen to them as they listened to St. Paul in the synagogues - by the standard of God's Word. And then, with repentance and faith in Christ as a way of life - not more chances to clean up your act . . . feel free to dream a little. You are permitted to dream of a day when you and all of God's people may be free of every aspect of the temporal curses of sin - yours and that which afflicts you in the world. The true prophets proclaim that such a day is coming for the people of God in Christ Jesus. It will be the Day of Glory when we all get to enter the real promised land . . . and about that day, you are perfectly free to embrace it and . . . dream on.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.