

Sermon 2009 Epiphany 4
Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Theme: "A Prophet Like Me"

Moses was both their pastor and their political leader and the people of God had come to depend on him greatly. Now was the time for Moses to die and Joshua to take over his position. So the whole book of Deuteronomy is a sermon from Moses to prepare the people for this transition.

He retraces their history together from Egypt over the past 40 years and reminds them time and again that the key to their prosperity is to listen to the voice of the Lord and to do what he says. Times change. People don't.

Today you and I face many difficulties in this world just as the people of Moses did. And today the key to prosperity is still the same. President Bush has come and gone and President Obama will come and go. And while many pin their hopes and dreams on whomever is holding office at any given time, we know that no person can live up to the expectations placed upon him by so many followers. Moses knew that too and that is why he pointed his people to the Word of God.

Remember that the word “epiphany” means to become manifest or to appear. During this season of the church year we see how it appeared more and more that Christ was indeed the very son of God and that he was the one for whom God’s people had been searching – the Christ – the Messiah. The season of Epiphany ends with the Transfiguration where Christ is transfigured on a mountain top and Peter, James and John see him for the first time in his glory as the very son of God.

Following the Sunday of the Transfiguration we begin the dark descent into Lent and finally Good Friday, BUT remember that the Sundays during that time are NOT part of Lent. We refer to them as Sundays IN Lent not Sundays OF Lent. That is because that Lord never stops revealing himself to us. The longer we are consciously with him the more we will know him and the more he will be part of us.

When Neal was born, we took him home from the hospital and suddenly we had a baby. He ate. He slept. He went through packs of diapers and cases of formula, but I can’t honestly say that he was part of me, that I was connected to him.

He was sort of like having a really high maintenance puppy. But as I held him and fed him and played with him; as we watched ER and Chicago Hope together while Danya was at choir practice; he and I began to bond. I can distinctly remember the day when he was six months old, that he looked at me and I could see recognition and love in his eyes. That was an epiphany. Suddenly this high maintenance puppy had become my oldest son. However, that day may never have come had I not invested the time with him. It does not happen automatically just because you share the same address.

Likewise, many Christians never invest the time to really get to know their Lord. They think that they have been Baptized and perhaps even confirmed and that's enough. Well, in the sense of being claimed by Christ for eternal life, it is enough. All that needs to be done for salvation has been done. But Christ has so much more to offer.

We live our lives in the midst of many dangers; dangers to our person surely but more importantly, dangers to our soul. Our youth are being pressured within and without every day to give in

and become sexually involved at younger and younger ages because everyone is doing it and it's fun, or to use various substances to help them turn off the pressure of life. Adults are being terrified by an economic downturn and abandoning all values in order to make more money for fear that God will not take care of them – even committing suicide rather than face the prospect of losing their material goods. Politicians are lying and cheating to secure their positions because they know that volatile financial times make for volatile elections. In short, the devil is hard at work trying to keep us distracted from that which we really need.

I welcome these hard times because sometimes we need the layers of veneer stripped off of our lives to see the beauty that lies beneath. Eventually the dangers of this world will knock every one of us down. It is not "if" but "when." Maybe you have already experience being knocked down in your life or maybe your beating is yet to come but I guarantee you that you will experience it eventually because we are simply too frail to stand

upright forever and anyone who says that he will not fall is either delusional or a liar.

But when we have been knocked down; that is when knowing Jesus becomes truly important to us. That is when our faith in our prophet, a prophet like Moses but far surpassing Moses, supports us in all dangers and carries us through all the temptations to which we have fallen prey. That is when we are like beautiful antiques that have been covered by decades of paint and shellac. Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, begins sanding away the layers and layers of ugly veneer to expose the beauty that he created.

That is when it is good to know the Lord not as a concept or an obligation but as the one who has all authority. He even commands demons and they have no choice but to obey. When everything is puppies and sunshine, it is nice to have a Lord in heaven. But when the darkness comes and things are scary and uncertain, it is imperative.

I invite you always being growing in Christ. Now is the time to cling to him as tightly as you can. Now is the time to stop

finding excuses to skip Bible Study. You are not too busy to gather together and study his Word and if you are, better examine your priorities. Now is the time to make worship your highest priority instead of being just one of many options. Sports, work, vacation and extra sleep are not going to see you through the crises of life, but Jesus will. His Word has power in and of itself.

When Jesus simply commanded the demons to leave the man and they did, people were shocked and amazed. No one else on earth could do that. No one could calm a storm by speaking. No one could call a dead man to life by speaking. But Jesus can do all of that. Open your eyes and your ears and your heart and let Christ appear to you. Never stop growing in him and he will never stop amazing you. AMEN.