

# Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Epiphany 4, Supplement Series B, January 28, 2018

Theme: God wants you to listen!

I. To Jesus, who is God's Word

II. To prophets, who speak God's Word

INJ We are surrounded by so much noise! Radio, TV, Facebook, YouTube, politics, weather, opinion, advertisements, sports. How do we deal with all the commotion? We can filter it, so the unimportant is eliminated from our news feed. I mute commercials when I watch TV. We can turn off what is annoying or inappropriate. (Have you ever done that? Or do you keep watching?) It helps to recognize that clickbait is an attempt to raise your curiosity with a surprising or edgy or interesting headline. Don't follow the link! Keep your head about you in this noisy world, so you can focus on that is important and meaningful and productive.

How do you know what is important, meaningful, and productive? Outward appearances can be deceiving! Sinful people manipulate situations. Urgent! You have to pay attention to me because the time is short and the consequences huge. When money is involved, we are interested, right? We are swayed by emotional messages that get us to empathize with victims. Peer pressure can motivate us in ways that are not always good.

What should we pay attention to and what should we ignore? Wouldn't it be great to be able to talk with God about it face to face? Ask him, and then get an answer from his own mouth? Sounds enticing, doesn't it? Can you picture yourself standing in front of God, hearing him directly? There would be nothing fake, nothing uncertain, but only the Word of the Lord. Actually, God did it that way once. At a place called Mt. Horeb.

It didn't go so well. The Lord revealed himself in thunderous glory to the people of Israel. His holiness was on display, and sinful people were terrified! They begged God not to reveal himself that way, or they would die. The Lord agreed. He would not communicate with his people directly, but indirectly, through words. God wants us to listen to him. Don't ignore or filter out or mute or turn him off. God wants you to listen to Jesus, who is God's Word, and to listen to prophets, who speak God's Word.

Our lesson takes place near the end of Moses' life. He had been the leader of God's people for 40 years. He had opposed Pharaoh during the 10 plagues. He had lifted his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted and they walked through on dry land. Moses was the one who brought water and manna to them. Moses had walked up that fearsome mountain of God, Horeb (also called Sinai). Moses spoke with God face to face! He relayed

the Commandments, the worship rituals, the design of the tabernacle, the Word of God. Moses lifted the bronze snake on a pole and whoever looked at it lived. Moses had brought them to the edge of the Promised Land, and they were about to enter and take hold of their promised inheritance!

Only Moses didn't do all those things. God did. God used Moses as his servant, his mouthpiece, his tool. And it was spectacular! But God wouldn't continue to directly deal with people. He spoke a promise through Moses: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him." Someone would come after Moses to speak God's Words to the people.

Who would the promised prophet be? Someone who spoke like Moses did, with God's authority. Who wasn't wishy washy or indecisive. Who gave an answer that was reliable and true. Who didn't play favorites but who exposed sin wherever it was hiding. Who wasn't intimidated by politics or pressure, but who spoke the message of God clearly.

Who is the ultimate Prophet? This is God's promise of the coming Savior. In our Gospel today, when Jesus spoke, the people marveled that he taught with authority. They were amazed that he wasn't in it for personal gain, but for God's honor. God wanted them to listen. When they heard Jesus, they heard God himself. God wants us to listen to Jesus, too!

Jesus proclaims God's message that is both Law and Gospel. He urged people to repent, for the kingdom of God is near. He drove out demons to show that he delivers from Satan's tyranny. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead not to amass fame and fortune, but to show that he alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Good Shepherd and the Light of the world. Listen to him!

Jesus reveals what God is like. We could never see God directly and survive: our sin prevents us from approaching Holy God! But God approached us by a miraculous intervention. Jesus is God in the flesh, born at Christmas. The word we use is that God is "incarnate," that is, he took on human flesh and became just like us. Moses prophesied that it would happen. The Prophet would be from among the brother Israelites, like Moses. Jesus cuts through all the Christmas noise. He is our Savior.

Jesus reveals God to us. Don't be distracted by unknowable mysteries, but focus on the certainty of what has been made known. Every moment, Jesus was pure, keeping the Law of God completely. He presented himself in our place as the perfect Substitute, holy and blameless. He sacrificed himself, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." God's message is that he himself has rescued us from sin and death and the power of the devil. In Christ Jesus we have forgiveness of sin.

God wants us to listen to Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus is called the Word. "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us." He is not only God's messenger, but he is the Message, too. He is a message that we must not ignore, mute, or tune out. His message is the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." That message is the tool of God, for "faith comes from hearing the message."

God sent his Son as the ultimate Prophet, so that we would listen to him. I know some people say they are Christians but they studiously avoid listening to God's Word. I don't know that the two are compatible. Those who are God's people listen to what he says. Cut through the noise and listen to Jesus, since he is God's Word. If we won't listen, then we have separated ourselves from God completely!

Jesus was only a visible prophet for a spot in time, at the center of history. Only those people alive then saw or heard him directly. So then how could believers from Moses to Jesus listen to God? How can we listen to him today? God uses prophets to speak his words. He revealed himself indirectly through people like Moses, David, Isaiah. People like Paul, John and Peter. People in history like Martin Luther and your parents and your pastors. Prophets speak God's Word, and God wants you to listen to them!

Why should we listen? There isn't anything special about the people standing there. Sunday School teachers are members of your own family. I am a regular guy, living the faith just like you. When you speak with an elder of the congregation, he doesn't have golden light emanating from behind him. In fact, look at all the prophets in the Bible and in history, and you will see sinful people. People who were violent and greedy and impure and doubting and weak. Look at the prophets God sends, and you will see people who are just like you. They need a Savior, too!

So why listen to them? Not because of their personality, but because of the message they bring. God says about his ultimate Prophet, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I command him." God's inspired Word in the Bible is the reliable message every prophet speaks. The center and focus is Jesus. Listen! Take to heart the message, the word of God spoken by prophets.

The message is difficult to accept. God calls you to repent of your sin. To admit you are guilty. To confess your stubborn rebellion and your selfish pride. Yes, you have failed to honor God – remember how you used his name in vain? How you abused his undeserved love? How you took for granted his forgiveness? Yes, the Lord himself calls you to account for listening to the noise and failing to listen to his word.

The noise of life may seem sweeter than the message of God. You

might lose yourself in the noise and forget about your need for a Savior from sin. Wake up! Listen to the message proclaimed by God's prophets, so that you know how much you need God's rescue. Then, listen to the rescue he accomplished! "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." The ultimate Prophet is also our Great High Priest, the sacrifice for sin once for all. He is our Victorious King, who defeated sin and death and the devil. All those sins you have committed, Jesus took to the cross and paid the debt with his holy, precious blood. He washed you clean in the water of baptism and he declares you not guilty. Listen to God's prophets speak God's Word to you!

Through the listening, God strengthens our faith. His word builds us up so we stand firmly in his promises. He prepares us for the coming storms and he steadies us during them. Through the words we listen to, he fills us with the Holy Spirit and he calms our fears. The noise just makes us more frustrated and more fearful and more stressed. Be still! God does miracles through the words spoken by his prophets. He wants us to listen to them.

God's words come with a warning. To any who would represent the Lord and speak his words: don't twist or warp or change anything. Don't paste godly PR over sinful intentions. Don't support idols who cannot speak. Don't think you can get away with replacing repentance and God's Savior with something you dreamed up. Don't shift the attention away from Jesus onto yourself. "That prophet shall die."

The warning extends to each of us. "Anyone who will not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account." Where God's true words are being proclaimed, there our ears need to be. We hold regular worship services so you can listen. We have Bible Class and Sunday School. We support a Lutheran Elementary School. Use God's Word at home with family. God wants you to listen!

Wait. I know the idea that is already developing in your mind and heart. You are thinking about your listening, aren't you? I have to listen more. When I don't listen, when I don't pay attention, when I don't care, woe is me. But the act of your listening isn't the point. That you hear what Jesus says is the point. You are listening to the ultimate Prophet, your Savior, who forgives your sins. His words are sweeter than honey and more precious than silver or gold. He announces peace. We listen to hear him.

How can I hear more of God's peace? I don't want the noise of life to drive Jesus out of my ears. Filter, mute, and ignore everything else, but Jesus' words are my treasure. Listen to them, but also speak them to those you love. Then you also will be a prophet, with the words of God that give life. It's not noise. Let's listen to Jesus together! SDG Amen.