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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, in our human society there are certain professions that are no longer.

There are certain career paths that are no longer an option.

For instance, there was once a need for lighthouse keepers.

There was once a need for persons to maintain the light of navigation beacons.

But no more. Lighthouses have since become automated.

The last "officially" manned lighthouse was Boston Light.

It was manned by the Coast Guard until 1998, and is now actively staffed by volunteers. And it is in fact the only lighthouse in the United States that is still manned.

PAUSE

There is also no longer the need for whaleboat captains or whaleboat fisherman.

At one time, New Bedford, Massachusetts was the center of the world because of the whaling industry, and the oil that was brought into this port was used to light the world.

But the discovery of oil in Titusville, PA, spelled the downfall of whaling.

And in 1927 the schooner known as the *John R. Mania* made the last whaling voyage from New Bedford.

PAUSE

And there is no longer a great need for typewriter repair persons, especially since the advent of computers and word processing programs.

You ask a teenager today, “what is a typewriter,” and they will look at you funny.

Indeed, a company called Gramercy Typewriter Company is one of the last typewriter repair businesses in the United States.

The company is located in New York City, and has been in business since 1932.

But for how much longer, right? How much longer will this company be in business?

Yes, there are certain professions in our society that have seen their day and have since become defunct.

And there are other professions that may be hanging on barely, but they, too, may soon become obsolete.

PAUSE

Now in our scripture readings today, we hear about another profession that has its day, but has since gone away.

The profession I am talking about is that of “prophet.”

Now, in ancient times, during the time of Bible, there were prophets all over the place.

And prophets were rather strange people. They were not the kind of people you would want for dinner guests.

For one thing, they tended to spew doom and gloom.

They tended to harp on God’s wrath. They tended to wax on about imminent death and destruction.

They were less than upbeat. They were less than cheery.

Now, yes, there were some prophets who proclaimed that peace would always prevail, that there was no threat to civilization.

But in general, prophets were on more firm ground when proclaiming doom and gloom, because if history had taught the prophets anything, it had taught them that no civilization was invincible.

The story of history was such that one civilization replaced another civilization, and another civilization replaced that civilization.

So, it was a pretty good bet that God's "wrath" would eventually come.

So, yes, prophets didn't make for good dinner guests because of their pessimistic outlook and their dire predictions.

Furthermore prophets just behaved strangely.

We remember John the Baptist who wore camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. Sound like somebody you want at your dinner party?

There was also the prophet Hosea who took a wife of whoredom.

In other words, Hosea intentionally married a prostitute to make a point regarding the nation of Israel, that Israel had committed whoredom by worshipping others gods.

And then there was prophet Isaiah who walked around naked for three years.

The prophet Jeremiah went a different route. He bought a new sash, and then buried it in the ground, only to dig it up and subsequently wear it, as dirty, filthy, and disgusting as it was.

The reason these prophets did these things was to make a point to the nation of Israel.

Their actions were symbolic and were called sign acts.

But the point being, these people would not make for the best dinner guests.

They were strange, and offensive, and in many cases repugnant.

But, nevertheless, prophesy was a thriving profession in the ancient world, and not just within the nation of Israel, but prophesy existed in other ancient nations as well.

But as strange and perturbing as prophets could be, one dared not do away with a prophet, because one could never be sure if a particular prophet was truly sent by God.

The only way to know if a person was truly a prophet was after the fact.

In other words, if the words of a prophet came to pass, well then, that person must have been a prophet.

Which is why it says in our reading today from Ezekiel, “Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.”

One would think that if people refused to listen to the so-called prophet, that so-called prophet had no influence on his audience, and so that person would appear to be a false prophet .

But a so-called prophet is measured by their prophesy, whether their words come to pass, and not whether their contemporaries acknowledged them to be prophets.

So this text from Ezekiel highlights this truth; the people will know that a prophet has been among them when in the future the words of Ezekiel come to fruition.

In the same vein, Jesus was a prophet.

Jesus, of course, predicted his suffering, death, and resurrection.

And we know Jesus to have been then a true prophet because his prophesy came to fruition, because Jesus was crucified and was raised on the third day.

But in today’s gospel reading from Mark, Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth.

He is among his own kin. And yet, the prophet Jesus is met with skepticism.

But this is not without precedent.

Jesus notes that those prophets who came before him had been rejected.

And in fact many prophets had been killed for proclaiming the word of God.

And so Jesus is in good company, as he himself is rejected and will be killed.

In fact, anyone who would set themselves up as a prophet should probably pause to consider whether they are ready to journey the path of rejection and death.

That almost seems to be a foregone conclusion with respect to the profession of prophet.

And we can think of some of our more modern prophets who suffered the same fate, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Annalena Tonelli, Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, to name just a few.

So one does have to consider prayerfully the possible consequences of being of prophet.

Even so, there is not the profession in our present day called “prophet.”

People, for instance, don’t go to college to study prophesy.

There is no degree tract with culminates in a person becoming a prophet or prophetess.

There is no official profession in our present day called “prophet” or “prophetess.”

True, there are the profession hacks called “fortune tellers” or “palm readers” and the like.

But no one goes around declaring themselves to be a prophet.

There is no profession where one practices prophesy, but there really, REALLY should be.

In truth, our world desperately needs more prophets.

In short, we desperately need more persons who are able to speak to the conscience of human society, which is what the ancient prophets did.

Prophets spoke to the conscience of a nation, they spoke to what was right.

And, today, we desperately need persons who rise up to galvanize the people to advocate for justice in the name of what is right.

Righteousness, a term with definite religious overtones, is nothing more than that, Friends. Righteousness is doing what is right.

Righteousness is doing what is right, and the ancient prophets called the people to do what was right.

Prophets call people to be righteous, to do what is right.

And so, who are the prophets of today? Can we even name them?

Malala Yousafzai, we might say, is a prophet. She stands up for what is right. She stands up for righteousness.

We may remember that Malala is a young Pakistani woman who advocates for female education.

Malala is a modern day prophetess.

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And then there is Greta Thunberg, another young prophetess.

Greta is a young Swedish woman, who stands up for what is right, who stands up for righteousness.

She has already devoted several years of her life advocating for the environment.

These young persons are doing incredible work around particular issues.

And, we would never want to take anything away from that.

But our world, our world longs for still larger voices.

Our world longs for prophets who address righteousness not just on one, but on many fronts.

Perhaps, this is why the office of the President of the United States is such a big deal in the world.

When the U.S. came to be a superpower in the world, the U.S., and particularly the office of President, had come to be seen as THE guiding light.

Many in the world had come to see the U.S. as having THE prophetic voice, THE voice of righteousness, THE voice which declared what it meant to do right.

That is an incredible burden to shoulder, and may be not a fair expectation.

For indeed, the office of president does not necessarily make for a prophet.

But we can certainly see how that office of president, or really any world leader, can become equated with that of a prophet in the eyes of the people, because powerful leaders have the attention of numerous people.

But again, great political power and authority does not translate into prophethood, that is, doing what is right, doing righteousness.

Indeed, if the Bible has taught us anything, Friends, it is this, that most often it is those who are on the fringes of society that speak truth to power.

In the Bible, it is those on the fringes of society who have actually critiqued the king's actions, usually in very harsh ways.

If the Bible has taught us anything, the prophets emerge then not from positions of authority, but from the bottom up.

And so, it is the voices of the disenfranchised, the voices of those experiencing injustice, the voices of those who lack power and authority, that we often have to listen to carefully.

For it is often among the disenfranchised, where the voice of prophet might be heard.

And from where the sign acts of true prophets are seen, like Rosa Parks who would not give up her seat, or the four men who engaged in a sit-in at a lunch counter in Woolworth.

Those were powerful modern day sign acts, symbolic act that made a powerful point.

It is among those who have little or no power where a prophet voice might be heard, like that of a young Pakistani woman, or that of a young Swedish woman.

PAUSE

Yes, even though there is no official profession called "prophet" or "prophetess," in our present world, the world needs more prophets, and we need to listen more intently to their voices.

Because when we do, when we take heed of the prophet and prophetess...when we listen to their voices, justice will roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.

And God's kingdom on earth, God's kingdom will inch ever closer to becoming reality.

Thanks be to God. Amen.