

Transcript of February 2-25 Gospel and Sermon

Welcome to worship. This season of epiphany, this season of revealing and bringing things to light, demonstrates Jesus' role as a prophet. There is going to be an audacious claim made today that we too as the church and individually our prophets. But I will tell you what a prophet does and later we will see if we can expand on this. And by the time we hit lunch, if you're just totally not buying it, you can let me know then. A prophet doesn't always tell the future. In fact, that's kind of a rare thing that a prophet does. A prophet speaks on behalf of. That's literally what the word means. So let that percolate as we worship together today. There is one note about the service that I would like to suggest or ask that we try. When we get to the sharing of the peace, back in the day you might shake hands or embrace or high-five or fist bump, that kind of thing. If you feel led to do that, that I think would be a very important part of the service. If you are a bit concerned about that or maybe not into that, I'll give you a sign you can do for people, which is the sign of peace. You'll see me do this myself. It's from American Sign Language. And so I would just say peace with you. If that's something you want to do as a greeting or you could just do like we did back in the day. So I'll leave that to you though. And again with the nice red signs that you have, shining those to the cameras to include those who will be watching the video of the service.

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the fourth chapter.

Then Jesus began to say to all who were in the synagogue in Nazareth, "Today this scripture has been

fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of Jesus and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

And Jesus said to them, "Doubtlessly you will go to me this proverb, 'Doctor cure yourself,' and you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And then Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown." But the truth is there were many widows in Israel at the time of Elijah when the heaven was shut for three years and six months and there was a severe famine over the land. Yet Elijah sent to none of them except a widow at Zephath inside. There were also many with a skin disease in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha. None of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. When the people heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up and they drove Jesus out of the town and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way. The gospel of our

Lord. Don't you be seated. Grace and peace to you from God who's very essence is love and who calls us into a life of love.

Sermon

So just to be sure you can hear me

okay? Okay.

Jesus' objection, this stink that he susses out in the afterglow of all of the praise, it's not that people are desperate to hear a good word for

themselves. It's that they are desperate to hear a good word for only themselves.

First, and maybe even the biggest slice of the pie, the preacher and academic Dr.

Abram Smith says this is what he would call a preoccupation with a

provincial perspective. I bet the guy alliterates all his sermons like that.

But what does it come down to except we want ours first and biggest? Jesus speaks

to God's universal love. For some reason we're not having it. Had a bus pass by,

people would have thrown Jesus right under. I guess the brow of a hill and a

cliff would have to do.

Jesus gets himself in trouble by not only mentioning prophets but identifying

himself as one who speaks on God's behalf. And then he tells stories about

prophets. There are prophets today as well, those who speak for. I know many of

you, you're waiting for this, oh he's gonna go on about that nice archbishop

again from the US who appealed to people to show mercy. Yes he is. Yeah, I'm

going to live up to that expectation today. The reaction to this was not all

weren't her words gracious. The reaction by the US president was to say so-called

pastor in a so-called church, a church which by the way predates the US, it was

also suggested by a member of Congress that the bishop should be deported.

When

you're born in New Jersey where do they deport you?

There is a Bruce Springsteen reference lurking in here because wasn't he also

from New Jersey? Where are they gonna deport him if he gets in trouble?

The parallels between Jeremiah's life, that prophet we heard read this morning,

and some of the things go on to where I want to tell you a story that I don't think we get to read about in church. I was at seminary of all places when we heard this story and one of my classmates bless him in his memory. Why didn't they tell us this in church? So maybe this is my opportunity. Once upon a time there was a king named Jehoiakim. I know a household name but let me tell you the story. Jehoiakim was kind of a puppet king anyway and had essentially mortgaged and forgotten the identity of who his people and who his God really were and decided to throw in with other foreign military powers to try to amass some sort of military security. The prophet Jeremiah, the one that nobody really ever listens to or ignore or imprisoned but he never gives up, writes a scroll speaking the truth, speaking for his people and speaking for their faith in God. He writes the scroll, he gives it to his scribe Baruch who takes it to the king and the king's courtiers unroll the scroll and they read it to him. Now there are a couple of details that I'll fill in here that are helpful in forming the picture of what's happening. Number one it's winter. Number two the custom when reading a scroll was to have a sharp almost dagger-like instrument to point to where you were reading in the lines and for those of us who barely got through Hebrew we wish we would have had such a pointer but I guess Professor Hutton decided we didn't meet them. Okay I'm over that. So those two details in mind as each line has read his highness takes that pointer daggery thing and starts to slice through the scroll. Holy writ mind you slice through the scroll ball it up and chuck it into the brazier to warm himself and of all the

courtiers who knew something about scripture and holy writ nobody said a word. Until finally the whole scroll was sliced and diced and incinerated.

And you know what Jeremiah did next? I'm gonna tell you. He sat right down he wrote it again. He decided this word needs to be said because this is what prophets do. Another bit of biography that may be folk in the Niagara region will particularly appreciate about the prophet Jeremiah. When people were feeling the most dejected and the least hopeful he bought a vineyard and I don't know enough about this yet so you can tell me if this is true but vineyards aren't a quick fix or a quick revenue generator. It's about seasons in and out generations in and out before the really good wine comes forth right? Oh good glad

at least I'm close. What a powerful thing for somebody in those times to plant a vineyard. That's a prophet-y thing to do isn't it? Speaking on behalf of God in action. Which reminds me prophets this is where I make the claim that that is what we are called as church to do is to be prophets not future tellers but those who speak on behalf of faith who speak on behalf of God's goodness and who speak on behalf of those as the good Bishop pointed out are living in fear.

Oh pastor Bart where would you get such a goofy idea as that? Oh I don't know how

about baptism? There is a point at which when we baptize we all make promises to each other about what we intend as individuals in church. We say things like so that we may proclaim Christ in word and deed yeah to love others to care for them in the world that God made and to work for justice and peace.

I'm thinking that's really prophet-y stuff there living and speaking on behalf of one of my favorite writers at least the more accessible stuff if I'm honest Dr. Walter Brueggeman speaks of the prophetic imagination and it's one that he believes the church should have and he says that the prophetic imagination leads to a prophetic task and here's the task that we speak truth in a society that lives in illusion. We grieve in a society that lives in denial and we hope in a society that lives in despair. I don't remember saying the job of a prophet was easy but it is certainly the job to which in our baptism and in our common faith God calls us to do. Amen.

(piano music)

(piano music)

(piano music)

(piano music)

(piano music)