### “A Prophet Like Moses” Steve Finlan for The First Church, January 21, 2024

**Deuteronomy 18:15–22**

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. 16This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” 17Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. 18I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. . . 21You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?’ 22If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.”

**Mark 1:14–20**

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Good morning to everyone here. Welcome to every warm heart that has come in from the cold.

Have you ever wondered what your life would have been like if you had gone to a different school, or taken different subjects? How would that have influenced you in your chosen career? If my wife had stayed in California, she probably would have continued to be a marine scientist or a medical illustrator. I could have made a choice to become a tree topper at one point in my life. What unforeseen events guided our pathways in life?

I don’t think many people would choose to be a prophet. In fact, it is pictured as an involuntary calling rather than a choice. Today’s Bible passages describe the experience of the prophets and their efforts to reveal the word of God. We also find ourselves having an eyewitness seat to the events at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

According to the Gospel of John, it was John the Baptist who first pointed out Jesus to Simon and Andrew (John 1:35–42). We read in Luke that Peter and Andrew were partners or co-workers with James and John (Luke 5:10). It seems that all four of them were already involved in doing religious work for John the Baptist, when they decided to follow Jesus. So the “immediately” in the Gospel of Mark is a bit over-stated.

In fact, the fast-paced Gospel of Mark uses “immediately” 28 times, more than the other three gospels combined. It’s part of his narrative pace-setting, heightening the excitement of the story. I think all four of these men already knew Jesus when they decided to follow him. It was not quite as miraculous as Mark pictures, and also not quite as inexplicable. Previous experiences, maybe previous conversations, had prepared Andrew, Simon, James, and John for their new life as followers of Jesus.

Furthermore, Jews already had a concept of a prophet, and the Messiah is basically a leader among prophets. The Deuteronomy text shows us one of the sources for the expectations for a prophet. Moses was a prophet, and here we learn that Moses was told that God will send others like him, that is, other prophets, to the people. They will be filled with God’s word, and what they say is going to happen, *will* happen. In fact, that is the test for whether they are true prophets or not.

However, what is prophesied may not happen immediately. For instance, Micah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, but it only happened 115 years after his foretelling. Jeremiah, who also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, affirmed the valid status of Micah the prophet, and pointed out that the king at the time did not put Micah to death for his frightening prophecy (Jer 26:18–19), meaning that the authorities should not put *him*, Jeremiah, to death either. Jeremiah’s prophecy of Jerusalem’s destruction *did* happen within his lifetime, though we don’t have any record of Jeremiah receiving more respect after that event. However, there must have been *some* respect, for his book was preserved and made part of the collection of the prophetic writings, as was Micah’s.

Being a prophet as a life-calling was more than the average person could handle. Most people feared that if they saw the Lord, they would be blasted on the spot. The Lord says “They are right in what they have said” (18:17). In other words, they *needed* somebody else to take on the prophetic role. *Therefore* he supplied them with prophets from time to time, and they were supposed to listen. Even that turns out to be a big ask for the people, for they were being asked to make a leap of faith. Imagine how you might reacted if you heard some of the prophecies.

Jeremiah was a prophet like Moses, telling the people things they did not want to hear, and calling them back to a more honest and reliable loyalty to the Creator God. Jesus also said some things at which the nation’s leaders and priests took offense. He, too, predicted an attack on Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, and it happened forty years after his lifetime, although it did not result in the religious authorities deciding that he was a legitimate prophet, although it *should* have, by the Deuteronomy rule.

At the very least, Jesus was a prophet like Moses. Moses was humble, just, compassionate, and wise, and so was Jesus. Moses taught them about God, and so did Jesus. But we also know Jesus was more than a prophet. He came to reveal the Father, and to confirm we are all part of the family of God.

Jesus’ call brought about a great change in those fishermen’s lives. The metaphor, “I will make you fish for people,” describes that sudden change of focus. It was quite a demand, to follow this daring preacher as he travelled throughout Jewish and Gentile regions, with no certainty of what the end result would be. It took faith and courage to join him, and to *stay* with him.

Have you ever had your beliefs challenged, or faith strengthened by your life events? Were you surprised by how resilient you turned out to be? Did these events motivate you to make improvements in your lifestyle and worship? We are right to remember and admire the apostles, despite knowing that they had their flaws, as humans do: Peter his impetuosity, Philip his simplicity, James and John their ambition and readiness to judge others, Simon the Zealot his political leanings.

But he set them fishing, and their successors—including all of us here today—are fishing still. You do not need to shout out God’s message on a street corner. In fact, sometimes just being with someone and listening can be a participation in the Word.

There are many stories of people finding their calling in life. Sometimes they face many obstacles. I want to use Susan Boyle as an example. When she took part in “Britain’s Got Talent,” was laughed at by some people in the audience when she walked on stage. She didn’t look the part of a pop star. But then she sang, and knocked everybody’s socks off. She became an instant celebrity, which came with its own difficulties, such as a brother who tried to take advantage of her financially. She had many difficulties growing up. She was misdiagnosed with brain damage, when what she actually had was a form of autism, along with epilepsy. She was beaten by her father and mocked by schoolmates. She had to deal with the death of her mother and her closest sister. She did get to return to “Britain’s Got Talent” and sing again, and has made eight albums. And she helped launch a Scottish Catholic charity drive three years in a row.

Returning to the theme of the Bible passages. They say that we are called to recognize the prophet whom God has sent us. I think that, at least, means Jesus, and possibly subsequent Christian prophets. We are also called to follow Jesus, if not as apostles or prophets, then as disciples, that is, followers. Following Jesus means remembering the love command, seeking to do the will of God every day (Matt 6:10), storing up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:20), and striving first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt 6:32). Put first things first. Spiritual things are the first things. What are those spiritual things in your life?

Take a moment to reflect upon your life’s journey so far. Can you see how a sudden change became a new life’s adventure? Can you see how God’s plan is unfolding with you? Know that God and Jesus are ready to offer you the kingdom, to be filled with the joy of the Spirit each day. Know that you are cherished.