

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20**

*Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (Series B)*

**Lessons for the Day: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28**

**Don't Believe Everything You Hear!**

*January 28, 2018*

*“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Over the past few years, there has been a dramatic increase in what is known as “fake news”. In point of fact, fake news has been around throughout all of history. We’ve always had propaganda that consists of deliberate misinformation or hoaxes, designed to mislead, confuse, or frighten. People have long twisted facts to damage an agency or a person, perhaps to gain financially or politically.

But, thanks to the internet, it seems that fake news is spiralling out of control. It is true that much of the fake news is meant to be satire, but a lot of it is what is known as “clickbait”: they are the headlines that are designed to look like real news, which lure you into clicking on a site, thereby increasing that site’s advertising revenues.

I truly hope you realize that you can’t believe everything you hear, especially when it comes to the internet. The web can be a useful tool, but it is also a great source of misinformation. Just because your friends share something on Facebook or Twitter, it doesn’t mean it is true. Just because your favourite celebrity said it, it doesn’t mean it is true. So much fake news is available that the *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* (IFLA) published a diagram to assist people in recognizing fake news: Consider the source (to understand its mission and purpose); Read beyond the headline (to understand the whole story); Check the authors (to see if they are real and credible); Assess the supporting sources (to ensure they support the claims); Check the date of publication (to see if the story is relevant and up to date); Ask if it is a joke (to determine if it is meant to be satire); Review your own biases (to see if they are affecting your judgement); Ask experts (to get confirmation from independent people with knowledge).

Nowhere is this lesson more important than in the spiritual realm. In our world today, there are far too many preachers with their own sets of ideas and beliefs which they claim to be from God, but are often in clear contradiction to the teachings of Holy Scripture. Don’t believe everything you hear! But what should we believe? That is a question with eternal importance. With the hundreds and hundreds of various religious philosophies and teachings; with any number of people who claim to have the ultimate answers, or who claim to have the latest and greatest word from God, we need to know the difference between those who really do speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but God’s truth; and those who are really speaking for themselves, or who are spreading the devil’s lies.

Who can you believe? I am well aware that there is a certain amount of irony in the sermon today. After all, here I am, a so-called expert in theology telling you that there is spiritual truth and spiritual error. On the one hand I am telling you that you shouldn’t believe everything that you hear, but I also want you to believe what I am telling you. In fact, I hope and pray that you are listening to me, and heeding my words as truth. It is not pride, or a sense of superiority, or a conviction that I have answers no one else can discover. I say this because I am confident in the knowledge that I am not sharing my own words, but the words and wisdom of the One who truly is an expert in the field of spiritual matters. I am only a messenger, sharing with you the Words that God Himself has given to us in His Holy Scriptures.

Who can you believe? As Moses was addressing the people of Israel shortly before his death, he warned them not to believe everything they heard. There would be false prophets, he told them, who would come and who would even claim to speak in the name of the Lord. When we see just how many false prophets are proclaiming their own brand of truth to people today, it seems that Moses understated the problem. We've had the David Koresches or the Jimmy Joneses, who have mislead people into believing they were the messiah, and who caused the death of all of their followers. Witches and pagans, using the nicer title, 'wiccans', are gaining converts as they portray themselves as simple naturalists who are getting in touch with the world around us as they revere the 'earth mother, who is the source of life'. New age religions have people seeking energy and physical and spiritual healing from crystals, or through uniting with of the supposed 'universal soul' that is part of all life. This doesn't even include all the vast differences within the church today. Preachers stand up and deny the very words of Scripture, the very Word of the Lord. They tell us that the bible is just another book, written by men to teach a simple moral code. They deny the whole idea of a virgin birth, not to mention their denial of the whole life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They will say that there is no hell. Some have even said that there is no bodily resurrection of heaven. They speak in spiritual terms about spiritual needs—but they do it apart from the Spirit of Truth and Holiness, who is God Himself. The sad thing is that these false prophets are misleading so many. They have convinced people to follow them, to listen to them—and they lead them away from God and His Word of Life.

Don't believe everything you hear! Just because someone has some pious sounding phrases and actions does not mean that they are speaking in the name of the Lord. Moses told the people: ***“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”*** (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, ESV) If your own brother or son or daughter, your wife or your closest friend should try to lure you away from the truth of God, Moses says: ***“you shall not yield to him or listen to him”***.(Deuteronomy 13:8, ESV)

So who do we believe? Moses told the people of Israel that there was someone they could trust. He spoke of the prophet who would come, the prophet the Lord would raise up. God promised: ***I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*** This is the only one we need to hear. He is the One whose actions back up His Words. He is the One whose Word is so powerful that even the demons must obey Him. He is the One who teaches with truth and authority, as He speaks the word of God. He speaks that word of God, for He is God. The One we can believe, the One who speaks the truth we all need to hear, the One who is our hope, our life and our peace is Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate prophet, who makes God known to us as no one else ever could. He is the One who reveals God's great love for us as He comes to bring us the forgiveness and life that our sin has destroyed. He gives His life for us on the cross, as the perfect sacrifice for sin, and He backs up the truth of His Word as He rises to life again. He, who is the source of all knowledge, all authority and all power speaks to us and tells us the truth—God's truth, the truth of life in its fulness, through faith in Him.

Don't believe everything you hear—but you can, and should believe what God says to you, for He will never lie to you. He will never lead you astray. He is still the ultimate voice of authority and truth. When He speaks, everyone should listen. He speaks—and He calls us to His forgiveness in Christ. He calls us to leave our sin, and the death it brings, to have the life that only He can give. There are those who would say we have evolved beyond our need for this kind of God. But nothing could be further from the truth. Don't believe everything you hear—but listen to God and to His promises for you in Christ. Listen to Him, for He speaks the truth, the whole truth and the absolute truth of the glory that is yours by His grace, a glory we will share with all those who have heard and listened to His Word of life and salvation. No, this isn't fake news. It is the best news, especially because it is the truth! Amen.