

*The Second Sunday after Pentecost*

June 26, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Kings 22:6-28

*So the king of Israel brought together the prophets--about four hundred men--and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?" The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." "The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied. So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once." Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the LORD says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'" All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the LORD will give it into the king's hand." The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." But Micaiah said, "As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me." When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the LORD will give it into the king's hand." The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?" Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' " "By what means?" the LORD asked. " 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. " 'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the LORD. 'Go and do it.' " "So now the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you." Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the LORD go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked. Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room." The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'" Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!" (NIV)*

When people learn I'm a pastor, sometimes those people will ask me questions. One of the most, if not the most, frequent questions I get is: "What is the difference between your church and others? Why are there so many different churches and religions? If there is only one Bible why so many teachings out there?" How would you

answer such questions? You might start by asking them where an enemy who wanted to destroy them would attack. Wouldn't an enemy attack where it could do the most damage? An enemy would go after the very thing that protects and provides and keeps us safe, wouldn't he? He would try to take out a person's strongest weapon.

Now consider the means through which the Lord made us His own. ***"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God"*** (1 Peter 1). Note again where our saving faith in Jesus comes from: ***"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"*** (Romans 10). Jesus tells us this morning in our Gospel how we have a safe house, a strong house, a home that will not sink or be blown over in the wind and storms. ***"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."*** Think of the strongest weapon we have as Christians. ***"Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"*** (Ephesians 6).

So where do you think our number one enemy, the devil, is going to attack first and fiercest? Will Satan not attack this unique and Holy Book written over a period of more than 1500 years by more than 40 authors, yet with single purpose and message without a single error? Will Satan not try to do the most damage of all to the Scriptures which are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? Will not the evil one constantly be trying to undermine the Bible because the devil knows these are not just the words of men, but he too knows what it actually is - the Word of God?

So why should we be surprised at all to see so many differences and religions and teachings out there? It is a reminder of the devil at work. The Word will always be under attack. We hear that message loud and clear in all three of our Scripture lessons today. Jesus warns us in this world there will be many false prophets and false teachers. There will be those who look like sheep but are really wolves. Turning back nearly 3000 years, we find the devil was at it even then attacking the true Word of God, trying to deceive with his lies. As we look at this account may we learn to faithfully hold onto the Word of God - to the Word of truth. May we: **Mark the words of a true prophet of God.**

This Old Testament story I believe I can safely say is not one of the more well-known ones. Depending on how much of Israel's history you remember you might recall that the kingdom was now divided. In the north the king of Israel was Ahab. He was very wicked, as was his wife Jezebel. He did not listen to the Lord or God's prophets. He worshipped false gods and did more evil in God's eyes than all the kings before him. On the throne in Judah, the southern kingdom, was Jehoshaphat. He was a good king who tried to do right in the eyes of the Lord. While divided these two kings had a bond because the son of Jehoshaphat had married a daughter of Ahab. Ahab calls for Jehoshaphat and reminds him that with the last victory the Lord graciously gave Ahab over Aram three years earlier they failed to claim back an important city. So Ahab asks if they could unite and take back Ramoth Gilead which had been their city. Jehoshaphat agrees to provide military aid.

But then Jehoshaphat makes one request: ***"First seek the counsel of the LORD."*** So Ahab brings in these prophets, about 400 of them, and when he asks them if he should go to war they all say the same thing. ***"Go, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."*** Yet, Jehoshaphat recognizes these are not the Lord's prophets and asks: ***"Is***

*there not a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?"* There was one but, as Ahab said with his own words, he hated him. He hated Micaiah cause he never told Ahab what he wanted to hear. He told Ahab the truth about his relationship to God. After Jehoshaphat rebukes Ahab for saying such things about God's prophet they call for him.

Before Micaiah arrives, we are introduced to one prophet in particular, a man named Zedekiah. He puts on quite a display for the kings. He flashes some iron horns he had made and declares: ***"with these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed."*** Like many false prophets, he graphically appeals to their pride and power. He flatters his hearers with a message they want to hear. And all the other prophets do the same. The messenger who summons Micaiah tries to persuade him to follow suit: ***"Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."*** But Micaiah said, ***"As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me."*** That is a prophet of God—one who simply says: *"thus says the Lord"*! In the face of all that pressure to tell the people what they want to hear, this is a bold stand. Listen again and mark these words of a true prophet of God: ***"As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me."***

This is exactly what the prophet Micaiah does. First, he uses some sarcasm which is a bit difficult to pick up in our English translation. He basically mimics the false prophets repeating their message sarcastically. Ahab does not like that either. In a case of irony Ahab now demands: ***"How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"*** Really? Since when did Ahab want to hear the truth? Since when did he want to start listening to the Lord? He did not want to obey God. He did not want the truth. But now Ahab would get it.

Micaiah tells the king exactly what will happen if they were to go to war with Aram. They would be scattered. The king will be killed. There will be no victory as all the other prophets predicted. When Ahab cries out to Jehoshaphat, ***"Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"*** Micaiah gives the king of Israel and us a unique behind the scenes look. The Lord was sitting on his throne with his angels around conversing about how they will get wicked Ahab to go to his death in Ramoth Gilead as Elijah had foretold. Then Satan, the lying spirit came forward, and said he would entice Ahab. When asked how, the devil said he would do it by using the prophets to lie. He would put lying spirits in their mouths to deceive them. No wonder the apostle John writes: ***"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"*** (1 John 4).

But even after Micaiah tells them the word of God, even after he tells them the truth, even after he tells them exactly what will happen and how he even knows it will happen, all he gets is a slap in the face from Zedekiah and a ticket back to prison. Ahab says: ***"Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely."*** Micaiah declared, ***"If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me."*** Then he added, ***"Mark my words, all you people!"*** Why would the people want to mark his words? Why should we mark the words of a true prophet of God? All we have to do is read on. The words of God's prophets are always true. Ahab would go to war, and, knowing the Arameans wanted his life, he dressed as a civilian to

trick them. But they recognized Jehoshaphat was not the king of Israel and a random bow shot fatally wounded Ahab. That very evening wicked King Ahab died and as his blood washed out from the chariot the dogs licked it just as the Lord had said. Mark my words indeed!

Since this story is a such long one to retell, there is not a whole lot of time for application although there are many applications for our lives we can draw from this lesson. First, may there be a warning for us all. Are we ever like wicked Ahab in that we want to hear the truth but not really hear the truth? We want to listen to God's Word, but only the parts we want to hear. Other parts we don't like as much, especially when His Word points out our sins. Do we ever take it out on the messenger, maybe even have a little hate or anger in our hearts? Then we too need to mark the words of God's prophet. It doesn't matter who gives us the message when it is God's Word we need to hear, to listen to it, to take it to heart, to obey it. We will never win if we stand in opposition to God's Word.

We also have a warning that the devil wants the same thing from us that he wanted from Ahab - his life. Satan wants us to join him in a place of eternal torment. So he attacks the Word. He twists it, turns it, and changes it. He deceives with lies. So we need to take a stand. No matter who is the teacher or prophet, pastor or preacher, who proclaims this is what God says, we need to compare those words and hold them up to the Bible to make sure they really are. So we need to be in our Scriptures. We don't want to be tossed and turned about like little children with every teaching and deceit of men in their scheming. If the devil succeeds in getting us to set aside some little truths in Scripture then it will be easier for him to lead us away from all important truths - like Christ-crucified for sinners. If Satan prevails in getting us to doubt some of God's Word, he is then able start working on getting us to doubt the foundations of that Word - such as our victory found in the empty tomb and risen Savior. When the devil keeps our eyes on false promises or removes real promises, he can chip away at the biggest one that ***“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3).***

Dear friends, pray for pastors and teachers and people in our church like Micaiah. Pray that we are blessed with people who will speak the Word of God and speak it boldly, decisively, and without apology. Pray for those who will speak it faithfully despite the consequences. If people ask you what makes your church different don't shy away from telling them. Tell them we have a church whose goal is to preach God's Word, all of it without changing a thing - a church that will tell them the truth whether they like or not. Tell them how grateful we are to belong to a church body that strives most of all to teach God's Word in all it's truth and purity - after all His Word is the greatest weapon and blessing we have - may we always mark His Words for they are the words of eternal life! Amen.