

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
26 July 2026
Matthew 7:15-23 (Jeremiah 23:16-29; Romans 8:12-17)

Beware False Prophets

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew, the seventh chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The prophet Jeremiah warns us not to believe so-called prophets who are “filling you with vain hopes” because “they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.” He goes on to point out that false prophets tell us what we want to hear: that everything is great, that nothing bad will happen to us. Meanwhile, Jeremiah warns us of “the storm of the Lord,” of His wrath and judgment.

Needless to say, Jeremiah was not a popular prophet. He made people angry. He didn't just tell people what they wanted to hear. But he told them what the Lord wanted them to hear.

The prophet is often like John the Baptist, a “voice crying in the wilderness.” And Jeremiah points out that had the false prophets actually proclaimed the Word of God to His people, “they would have turned them from their evil way and the evil of their deeds.”

This is the calling of the prophet and the preacher of the prophetic Word—to call people to repent, to renounce evil, to turn from their wicked ways, to leave what the early church fathers called the way which leads to death, and instead follow the path which leads to life.

It is almost certain that we have more false prophets today than there were in Jeremiah's day. We have false prophets in the church, in politics, in sports, in entertainment, in science, in medicine, in schools and universities, in the media—all repeating the same lies, all repudiating

the Word of God. When things are fine, they tell us they are not. When things are bad, they tell us “No disaster will come upon you.” Our false prophets of today lead us away from the design of God’s creation for men and women, for families and children, for the proper role of authority. They drag us into ugly fights over identity politics. They lie about what Scripture teaches about right and wrong. They lead us to follow our feelings instead of the prophetic Word. And worst of all, they lie about our Lord Jesus Christ, trying to create Him in their own image.

“I did not send the prophets,” says the Lord, “yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.”

Our Lord Jesus Himself also warns us: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

A false prophet is not just misleading. A false prophet is a wolf who seeks your destruction. He is a liar, and Satan is the father of lies. Be very careful, dear friends, to whom you listen, whom you believe, to whom you entrust your body and your soul. Be wise and discerning.

But most of all, know what the Word of God is, so that you can spot and expose the false prophets instead of falling for them. There is no substitute for knowing the Scriptures inside and out. This is the infallible revelation of the Word of God which will enable you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see through the wolf’s sheep-clothing. Liars and conmen talk a good talk. They quote Scripture. They make a lot of sense. And most of all, they tell us what we want to hear.

Jesus says that if you want to know if a tree is good or bad, examine the fruit. The fruit doesn’t lie. The fruit exposes the condition of the tree, be it good or diseased. And the diseased tree “is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Our Lord is very clear that false prophets are so clever that their works can deceive us into thinking they are bearing good fruit, “Did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?” they ask Jesus on the final day. And our Lord replies, “I never knew you; depart from me you workers of lawlessness.”

Lawlessness. That sounds a lot like what we are seeing all around us. Lawlessness. For the prophet proclaims the Law, calling people to repent of their sins, but they want to be affirmed and celebrated. They are lawless. They do not see the blessings of the prophet who proclaims the Law before declaring the Gospel. We live in a day and age where people see no need to repent. Everyone has an excuse. People protest in the streets to abolish law and order, to legitimize violence, to destroy freedom of speech and the right to worship God.

Workers of lawlessness are not prophets. Jesus does not know them—even if they invoke His name and claim to work miracles. If a so-called miracle-worker, in the words of our catechism, “teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word,” he “profanes the name of God among us.” And we pray, “Protect us from this, heavenly Father!”

We are called both to teach and to live according to the Word. We are called to teach rightly concerning our sinfulness and our need to repent. We are also called to teach rightly concerning our Lord’s mercy, His atoning death on the cross, His glorious resurrection, and the promise of eternal life to those who are baptized and who believe. We are called to confess this truth of God’s Word, and we are also called to live our lives as we would expect if we actually believed that this is indeed most certainly true.

If we truly believe that Jesus is physically and miraculously present in His Holy Supper, then our lives should be centered around the weekly Divine Service. If we truly believe that the Scriptures are life-giving, supernatural words, then our lives should likewise be centered around

the Word of God in daily reflection. If we truly believe that God hears our prayers, then our lives should be ordered by praying as a matter of course during the day and during the week.

But what if it isn't? What if "the cares and riches and pleasures of life" choke out the seed of God's Word and your "fruit does not mature," as our Lord teaches in the parable of the sower? Then the prophets call us to repentance. They tell us what we don't want to hear. They warn us like watchmen along the wall, telling us that our days are short, and the kingdom of God is at hand. The true prophet loves us enough not to whisper comfort in our ears but rather to jolt us out of our comfortable reality in order to save us from the path of destruction which the false prophets have placed us on: the way which leads to death.

The prophets point us to the Word of God—the Word which is the Scripture and the Word which is Christ Himself. The prophets tell us that all is not well, that our world is fallen, that our flesh is sinful, and that we need to repent. St. Paul says, "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Our flesh is not evil, but it is thoroughly corrupted. Our thoughts and desires are not necessarily God's will. But we do have the Scripture to guide us, and the love of Christ who has redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit's enlightenment calling us to heed the word of the prophets "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

So do not follow false prophets, dear friends, whether they claim to speak for church or society. Test everything according to the Word of God, which is always true. Your emotions can deceive you. Visions can be misleading. Your own desires can masquerade as prophecy. The claims that "I have dreamed, I have dreamed" are often "lies" as Jeremiah warns us. Let us rather look to the Word of God, praying with the hymn:

*Thy strong Word did cleave the darkness;
At Thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank Thee,
While Thine ordered seasons run.*

*Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous;
Bright with Thine own holiness,
Glorious now, we press toward glory,
And our lives our hopes confess*

*Give us lips to sing Thy glory.
Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,
Mouths to speak Thy holy name.*

The strong word of the True Prophet bespeaks you righteous. In Him, you are forgiven
for all of your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—
Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Larry Beane