

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 5, 2009  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church  
Grand Island, NY 14072

Ezekiel 2:1-5  
Mark 6:1-13

## "A Prophet's Perspective"

By  
Arthur Morth

A very popular recreational activity these days is participating in role playing games such as WarCraft, Final Fantasy, and Dungeons and Dragons. The equivalent activity when I was young was playing "Let's Pretend." In all these current and past games, the players imagine themselves being something other than what they are.

Let's do some of our own role playing right now. I'll be dungeon master. Start by thinking about the dream job you had or wished you had. You get to pick it, whether it is a job to earn a living or a volunteer activity. What ever it is, you are good at it. Let's go to your workplace. Along comes a co-worker, and he says "Thank you." When you ask, "What for?" he replies that a couple months back you had given him some advice on a problem. Actually, you had given him several possible solutions and the likely result of pursuing each solution. He had chosen the one you thought best, and the results were every bit as good as you had predicted.

Later in the day, a member of another work group stops by to ask your advice on a problem that he and his cohorts have spent the past week trying to solve. You give him a couple of your ideas and suddenly he grins. "Ah ha, that's it. Thanks, you are a genius."

At lunch, the co-worker who had thanked you in the morning stops by again. He tells you that he and his wife own a week at Smugglers Notch, a great timeshare resort in Vermont. Originally his sister and her family were going to use it, but some scheduling conflicts have come up, so he asks if you and your family would like to use it. During break time, a quick search on the internet shows that the resort has a tremendous program for children, a spa, a golf course and was in a super area for hiking and biking. Other than the spa, everything is included. If that wasn't enough, the Ben and Jerry's ice cream factory is only a half hour away. All in all, it is easy to predict that this will be the vacation of a lifetime for your family.

With great excitement about your day, you head home. As soon as you get home, you tell your family about the great vacation you have planned. The responses are comments such "we wanted to go to the beach" and "that's too far to drive when gas is so expensive. "

**. . . A prophet is not without honor except in his home town and among his kin and in his own house . . .**

When we think about prophets, an image that is sure to pop up is that of a cartoon character wearing a long tattered robe and carrying a sign saying "the End is near." More recently with the difficult financial times, we have had all sorts of prophets wearing suits on CNN, Fox, CNBC and other TV channels saying the same thing, but with all sorts of charts to support their prophecies. In light of all the prophecies of gloom and doom, it isn't hard to see why most of the time, we would rather not deal with a prophet.

This isn't really a change. As we read in the Old Testament lesson for today, Ezekiel was sent to the people of Israel, **to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me. "I am**

**sending you them, and you shall say to them 'Thus says the Lord God.' Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they shall know that there has been a prophet among them."**

However, even as we see that the Lord sends prophets to warn people, we need to remember the prophets bring good news to those who listen. For example, there is Isaiah's joyous prophecy of the coming of Jesus – **"for a child has been born for us, a son given to us . . . Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** So as we talk about prophets, remember that while they may point out problems, they also point to a better way of life in the future.

All of us are prophets. Any parent knows that. Is there anyone who has been a parent and not prophesized doom to a child – "if you aren't careful, you are going to get hurt" or "if you hit your brother one more time, you are going to be grounded for a month?" Or an economic forecaster who told his or her spouse that "if we keep spending like that, we are going to end up in the poor house?"

But, we are also prophets when it comes to our church and spreading the word of Christ throughout our community and world.

As some of you know, I worked for many years as a research engineer. In that job one learns to observe what others consider trivial and use that information to decide why things are happening and what is likely to happen if things continue as they are. As I was preparing this message I started thinking about the disruptions that have occurred at St Timothy in the past ten years, and how many of them I saw coming. In retrospect, my accuracy was frightening.

With that in mind, it seems worthwhile to use our imaginations once more to consider what an Old Testament prophet such as Ezekiel would say about St Timothy.

First, he would say that we have a history of enthusiastic and committed members. He would point out our early members such as Erna Reichelt and Clarence Davis who got us off to a great start. He would mention Marty Doebert and Al Glassman who were the builders and maintainers of the property. Theirs was an all out effort; as I recall, Marty was Council President and chairman of the building committee when the Fellowship Hall was built. He was working full time and he and Carolyn were raising a family, too.

More recently there have been Dick Hall, John Werth and Nell Roberts. In the past, I have told you that Dick was always the man at the top of the ladder. However, he also was one of the first two deacons, and he built the altar rail, lecterns and the base for the baptismal font; all while he was working full time as a Dean at Buff State and living in an apartment. Just the logistics of doing all that carpentry without a basement work shop amazes me. John Werth, by himself, took care of mowing the church's lawn; a task that now takes 15 or 20 people. And Nell, everyone knows her incomparable commitment to the Day Care Center and to doing anything else that needed to be done.

Second, Ezekiel would point out that we have equally talented and committed workers in our current congregation, and that we should be proud of that.

Then, as prophets are prone to do, he would lower the hammer. He would point out that all of those past members had strong personalities and even stronger opinions which they were more than willing to voice. Some times, quite loudly. Some of Erna Reichelt's beratings of John Scarafia are classic. Dick Hall had a very pleasant smile all of the time, but one always knew when something at St Timothy displeased him. However, all of these past members respected

each other and recognized that what was important was arriving at a unified conclusion as to what was best for accomplishing the mission of St Timothy. and then doing it.

Next, Ezekiel would point out that this spirit of mutual trust and respect has weakened at St Timothy with members yelling at each other at meetings or threatening to withhold support because things weren't being done their way. That was rather painful so I hoped he would change the subject.

He would, but only a little bit, by mentioning an article from last Monday's Buffalo News that suggested that coffee shops such as Tim Horton's had come to mean to people what church used to. **As in a place you go a lot, on a certain schedule, where you come away feeling renewed, energized – and part of something bigger than yourself.**

I thought the description of the Tim Horton's experience really was very much like the spirit at St Timothy's 20 years ago so I asked Ezekiel what we could do, especially since we need to get back to that spirit just to keep up with the local donut place and all the other calls on our time.

He told me that while we needed our own prophet, most of the current ones are involved with economic forecasting on TV. But, no matter what it is called, we need external guidance. From my engineering days, the word was consultant. Ah yes, consultant – someone with an attaché case from at least 20 miles from home. The good news is that St Timothy has one, although the Synod uses the term transition pastor to describe someone such as Pastor Dean.

Over the past six weeks I have had a number of conversations with Pastor Dean about our congregation, where it has been, and what needs to be done to renew its energy. With regards to the problems and issues that we have, Pastor has been there and done that when it comes to working through such situations. As an engineer, I could bore you with some astounding numerical comparisons between St Timothy and his former congregation, Lord of Life, but I'll save that for later for anyone who cares to ask. I'll give you a hint – we don't look good.

In closing, I'll make my own forecast (as mentioned earlier, I've been pretty accurate in foreseeing things at St Timothy the past ten years). We have an immense amount of talent among our members that can be applied to getting us to where we need to be.

Besides committing to use those talents, individually and as a congregation, we need to recognize that we have drifted from a relationship with Christ and become wrapped up in ourselves. We must remember and renew that relationship with Christ. To the degree that every one of us commits to doing what is best for the overall good of St Timothy rather than doing things "my" way, we will be effective in reinvigorating this congregation.

In other words, each one of us needs to recognize that he or she has the power to predict the future of St Timothy and that his or her actions will lead to the fulfillment of that prophecy.

My prayer is that every member shares my positive outlook for the future of our congregation.