



This Week

OUR MISSION

As God's disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God's Word in its truth and purity.

By God's grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

This Week's Sermon: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Fear Your God

Grace and peace is yours through Jesus Christ, our Great prophet who communicates to us his love through the message of forgiveness.

Six years ago Melissa and I lived in an old farm house in Fredonia, Wisconsin. The house was in the middle of nowhere nestled amongst cornfields and old sheds. Our friends always joked that it was the perfect setting for a horror movie. Huge trees surrounded the place and at night the entire property was pitch black. It was a rather creepy feeling and at night the old basement was definitely off limits. On one particular night I was startled from sleep by a horrible screaming sound with my wife grabbing my arm saying, "Jay, there is something under the bed." I sat at the edge of the bed wondering what to do and careful not to let my feet dangle too far over the edge until we heard the screams again. We wondered what it was and finally realized it was outside of our window. My heart was racing as I grabbed the flashlight and spotted two huge raccoons fighting on a tree branch less than ten feet away. That was a terrifying night and it was hard to get back to sleep. I am sure that all of us have been frightened or even have general fears about certain things. Maybe it is the bump in the night that keeps us awake with at least one eye open. Maybe when our spouse is gone we stay out of the dark basement because of fear. Spiders or mice might be what make us shriek. I don't mind spiders or mice as long as you keep me away from snakes. All of us most likely have our own unique fears.

However, the Israelites in our lesson have a common fear. In our lesson we find the prophet Moses standing before the assembly reminiscing about a forty year old event. He reminded the Israelites that after God freed them from their slavery in Egypt the Lord appeared to them at Mount Sinai. God did not take on human form and walk around the Israelites' camp shaking hands. Instead, from the top of the mountain, God's majesty was seen in a powerful show of thunder and lightning. Trumpets could be heard as the entire

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mountain was engulfed in smoke. We are told that the people watching trembled with fear! They were terrified and cried out, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die!" We find the immediate response of Moses in Exodus 20. He tells them, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Today the Holy Spirit through these words reminds us that we need not be afraid of God but all of us need to fear him, that is, stand in awe of his power and majesty giving him the total respect that our God deserves! Respect the Lord by marveling at his mighty presence in your life and by listening intently to him as he speaks.

Respect the Lord by marveling at his mighty presence in your life.

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

Filled with awe at his presence

Two weeks ago Vicar and I drove to Waterton, Canada, for a pastor's conference. The lodge that we stayed at was located in the Northern part Glacier National Park. The mountains rose thousands of feet all around us. Deer and Big Horn sheep came to lick the

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salt off of the cars. In two days I took more than eighty pictures. But a snapshot does not do justice to the scenes that our eyes saw.

Today we have a 3,400 year old snap shot. Try to imagine being an Israelite in the middle of the desert standing before a huge mountain trembling in fear as you hide your eyes from the flames of fire and from the lightning that flashed. You cover your ears at the loud peals of thunder and the piercing sound of heavenly trumpets. The snapshot does not do justice! How terrifying it must have been. So often in our lives we are terrified more of the unknown than of the known, right? As I sat on my bed in the old farm house I had no idea what was making that awful noise and I was frightened. The basement is dark and who knows what is lurking in the corner? Why are bumps in the night scary? Because you don't know what went bump, right? When it comes to God it is not a fear of the unknown but of the known. Genuine fear overcame the Israelites because they realized that sinners can not stand in the presence of a Holy God and live. Sinners cannot live up to God's perfect standard no matter how hard they strive. The Israelites not only knew this but they experienced it. They said, "Moses don't let us hear, don't let us see or we will die!"

Where is the awe? Where is the fear of the Lord?

This show of power on Mount Sinai took place three months after the Israelites walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. They were led by a pillar of fire in the night and a pillar of cloud in the day. They were accustomed to God's power and presence. However, the fear and the respect that they had for the Lord faded with the lightning and smoke. God's chosen people did not spend years in the desert because the trip to the promised land was long. What was a 16 day journey took forty years because they were complainers and didn't trust the Lord's promises even though they saw his power on a daily basis. They lost the fear of the Lord. While Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai speaking to God the Israelites were busy melting down their jewelry in order to make a golden calf that they could worship! Where is the awe? Where is the fear of the Lord?

They were sinners with fickle faiths, but so are you and me! We need to be careful that our pride does not cause us to think that we are any stronger or any better than God's chosen people 3,000 years ago. The sin that corrupted their thoughts and attitudes is the same sin that plagues our hearts and lives. As sinners we

should be terrified of God. The sinful nature should quake in fear at God's holy presence because the sentence that we deserve for our mistakes and guilt is death in hell. Did you notice God's response after the people cried out, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die?" God continues with, "What they say is good!"

I have spoken with many teachers who tell me that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discipline students because the student knows that the teacher is not able to discipline them severely. Teachers cannot physically yank a kid out of the classroom, tug on their ears as in the past, or even lay a hand on them. No corporal punishment at all. Many students today have no fear and have no respect for authority. When you and I allow the sinful nature to ignore God's punishment for sin we become like a disrespectful brat who has no regard for the authority of the Lord. We no longer have godly fear when we allow sin to become the norm in our lives excusing it away as bad judgment, simple mistakes, or stuff that just happens. Satan wins the battle every time he convinces you and me that sin is not that big of a deal! Sin destroys the body and the soul! Our sinful nature needs to fear God and call out with the Israelites, "Don't let us die!" We need to fear God and give to him the proper respect as we live our lives in awe of his power.

We were not there to see the lightning and fire. Our ears did not hear the thunder or trumpets yet all of us have seen the majesty and power of God through the eyes of faith. We believe that these events happened and we take them to heart. Through faith we have stood in awe as we watched our Savior defy nature by walking on the water and commanding the storm to be quiet. Yet, does our faith die down as quickly as the storm did when we allow ourselves to be overcome with worry, showing disrespect by not having the confidence that God is in control of our lives? In the Gospel for today our God, Jesus, has shown us his awesome power by casting out a demon simply with a command. He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth but how often are we reluctant to have Jesus cast out the doubts, fears, and the temptations that linger in our lives? Have we been standing in awe of what God has done and can do in our lives? Or have we resorted to complaining and self reliance? Think about ourselves as a group of God's chosen people who were called out of the slavery of the devil. This church, you as members and I as a pastor, have visibly seen multiple blessings. Down-right awesome blessings! Faiths are growing and fruits of faith are evident everywhere. In 2005 Apostles Lutheran Church gained 21 communicants, baptized seven people, and were blessed with more than \$200,000 in total offerings. The preschool that is not even two years old already has a full enrollment of thirty-two students for next year. God's power and maj-

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esty is evident but as soon as the as we mention the blessings does grumbling, hesitation to move forward, skepticism, or the fear of the dollar sign take the place of celebrating what the Lord is doing?

Satan uses mundane lives and hectic schedules to remove the awe that we have for the Lord our God! How sad that is when his children loose fear and respect for their Creator and Savior. The Lord is more than just a friend. Our Father in Heaven is more than a last resort that can be turned to in times of difficulty. The Lord is our Holy God who is the center of our lives! He is all powerful! God is all important! You and I should daily tremble as we fall before him as sinners realizing how far we fall short of his glory. We are not holy but belong to the fires of hell. We are not deserving of his presence.

Does God have reason to question your love for him?

Yet, today we said at the beginning of the service that we have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. The only way that we are able to come into his presence is if he invites us. A holy God invites you and me as sinners to come into his presence to receive the forgiveness of sins. Now that is awesome! We should stand in awe of God not just for his power and the punishment that he can deliver but for the undeserved love, the peace, and the free forgiveness that he is willing to shower upon us. It is awe inspiring to be reminded today that Jesus not only chased a demon from the man in our Gospel lesson but he chased from our hearts our fiercest enemy, Satan, replacing hopelessness with the eternal hope of salvation! It is awe inspiring that we can be confident that when we come into God's presence through Jesus Christ we need not fear death but instead embrace life. How humbling it is to know that the guilt of pride, the sin of disrespecting the Lord and not fearing him has been removed by our perfect Savior's life. So that we would not die he died for us taking our punishment and giving us his holiness. Stand in awe of your Lord.

It is no secret that pictures do not do justice to beautiful landscapes. The picture we have of the fright that the Israelites felt is only a glimpse of the emotions that ran through the camp. Their terror motivated them to plead with Moses to be a mediator and talk to God on their behalf. Moses had a special relationship with the Lord and we are told that he spoke face to face with him. Even though Moses was very different from you and me he still was a sinner like all the rest. As he speaks the

words of his lesson he was very close to the end of his life. Moses was a special prophet, no doubt. However, as a sinner there was an end to his life and service. Therefore God, out of his love, promised his people and he promises you and me that a prophet would come who would be greater than Moses; a prophet who would never stop speaking to his people. This promise in Deuteronomy 18 was fulfilled 1,400 years later through Jesus. He was born from among his brother Israelites to share his Father's truth.

Filled with respect as we listen

Beginning at a very young age most of us were instructed by our parents to show respect to others by listening. How would you feel if I was constantly looking around at the ceiling while you were telling me something very important? Then when you finished I said, "What did you say? Were you talking to me?" You would probably be very upset thinking that I was very rude. If the President of the United States called you up on the phone I am most confident that none of us would say, "Sorry, got to go," and hang up. No, we would listen with the respect that our President deserves. But how often do we hang up on God as we push his word aside? Those of you who are married, what would happen if you listened to your spouse for only one hour throughout the week? First, I know that we men would be in grave danger. Second, we would most likely not have a clue what was going on in our spouse's life. If our spouse only gave one hour a week to us we may even start to question their love for us.

Does God have reason to question your love for him? He speaks very clearly through his Son, the Word of life. He communicates to us through Scripture which we can read and which we can listen to. Show respect to your God by learning what his will is in your life and then put his will into action! Listen to your Savior daily so that there will never be any question of how much he loves you. Everything that God wants you to know is contained in his Word and was spoken through his Son. Listen to him! Stand in awe of what he has to say. We came into God's presence confessing our sins and by Christ's authority Vicar Casmer forgave your every sin. The crowds marveled at Christ because he spoke with authority; I pray we marvel as well when Christ spoke, "It is finished," from the cross. No longer are you in your sins! No longer do you need to carry the heavy load of guilt. No longer does your past need to haunt you! Because as Christians we stand before God holy and blameless! We have the ability to fear the Lord without being afraid!

Jesus is the greatest prophet who continues to speak to us through the written and spoken Word.

Throughout this week pray that the Holy Spirit gives to

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you an increased respect for your Lord. May we always stand in awe of our Holy God's grace and power. May we always be eager to listen to Jesus, the greatest prophet, share with us the message of forgiveness and love. Amen.

Jay Bickelhaupt is serving as pastor at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.

<p>Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church Billings, Montana</p> <p>Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.</p> <p>Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes Sunday at 9:30 a.m. Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m. Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.</p> <p>Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a Bible Information Class.</p> <p>More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.</p>
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