

Goal: The hearers realize the responsibility of the pastor & themselves to God.

“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...And the LORD said...‘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.’” (Deuteronomy 18: 15 – 20)

The Oxford Dictionary says a prophet is “one who speaks for God.” Actually the definitions go on for a whole page, but “one who speaks for God” basically sums it up. But that seems like a pretty tall order, doesn't it?

One person described what a congregation is saying any time a pastor is installed as this: *“We want you to be responsible for saying and acting among us what we believe about God and the kingdom and the Gospel...We need help in keeping our beliefs sharp and accurate. We don't trust ourselves – our emotions seduce us into infidelities...We want you to help us: be our pastor, a minister of word and sacrament...We are going to ordain you to this ministry and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment but a way of life that we need lived out in our community... There may be times when we come to you as a committee or delegation and demand you tell us something else than what we are telling you now. Promise that you won't give in to what we demand of you...With these vows of ordination we are lashing you fast to the mast of word and sacrament so that you will be unable to respond to the siren voices.”*

Now, while it's true that we pastors are responsible to you; we're ultimately responsible to Jesus Christ, the Head Pastor of the Church. I am here to speak *His* word of **“reproof, correction, and training in righteousness”** of Law and Gospel – so that you, child of God, **“may be competent, equipped for every good work.”** (**“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience.”** (2 Timothy 3: 16 – 4: 2)

Often I'm told; *“That was a good sermon pastor.”* *“I wish the people who needed to hear it were here.”* Each comment, as well intended as it may be, shows a disconnect. A sermon is addressed to everyone, whether some are here or not. We make a mistake when we think it's addressed to someone else, not me. That's why Jesus warns, **“Judge**

not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7: 1 – 2)

At the same time, some of you might have liked what I said, but for the wrong reason. To enjoy hearing words of correction can lead to self-righteousness, making you think that it's enough to feel bad, there's no need to turn to Christ. The purpose of correction is to show us our desperate need for Jesus and our complete dependence on him, which leads us to confession of our sins. That leads us to correction, training, and equipping, the result of the Gospel's power inside of us.

The other comment I hear is, *“Pastor, you should pick nice passages and stay away from these others that we don't like, especially when school families are here.”* But I am called to preach God's Word, in it's entirety. There are lessons that are counter cultural, and ones that are not politically correct. We are not to try to make God fit into our worldview but consider how He calls us to live with His. Pastors have to be faithful to Jesus Christ, say and do what He wants. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God tells us that we are watchmen for you, and this is our responsibility: ***“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33: 7 – 9)***

So why do we talk about church and Bible class attendance, gossip, quarreling, selfishness, money, indifference? We have to talk about these because Christ has made it clear that these are symptoms that reveal what our relationship with him is like. These are external measurements of our spiritual condition.

God knows our heart and the sin that's there and He gives us pastors whose responsibility is to make us see our own sin, and our complete hopelessness. Just as that's not easy for you to hear, it's not easy for us to say. But we have to because we love Jesus and because we love you.

God knows our heart and the sin that's there. He knows our need for Jesus, who He gave for us, to live with us, to understand our needs, and us and to die for us. Jesus is our forgiveness, our help, and our hope. That's the most important message we must share with you, and like a parent to a child, we do that because we love you.

So here are questions for you to consider any time you're listening to a sermon:

- *What is the pastor saying to me—not someone else? Why is Christ telling me this? How do I apply this word from Christ to my life?*
- *What sins in my heart and life does this message reveal? What have I done wrong? What have I failed to do that I should?*
- *Am I humbling myself at the foot of the cross and confessing my total need for Christ? Where else am I going to find help with the changes I need?*
- *Knowing the Holy Spirit has promised to help me change, am I open to his work in me—even if it’s painful?*
- *Am I finding joy in the word of forgiveness that’s being spoken, and the assurance that I am receiving in the body and blood of my Lord?*

But there’s something else important because there are many members who aren’t here regularly and it’s not the responsibility of the pastor to take the message to them, it’s the responsibility of Christ’s church. And the church isn’t a building; it’s all of us. It’s all of our responsibility to take the message to those who aren’t here. Being here each week and putting our tithe into the offering plate is only part of what we’re to be doing. God’s word says what is even more important: ***“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*** (*Hebrews 10: 24 – 25*) We have to go to those who aren’t here, but there’s more. We need to encourage them and build them up. Too often we get involved in grumbling and gossiping but it does no good. We discourage one another and hear others say, *“Why bother?”*

God doesn’t deal with us that way, so why do we deal with each other that way? He teaches and corrects, but then trumps with the Gospel. While we need to show each other how sins affect our congregation, we need to trump that with the encouragement of the Gospel – the certainty of forgiveness and the power to change – ***“so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*** (*Ephesians 4:12 – 13*) My brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope that this helps you understand our responsibility to Christ and to each other – my responsibility as your pastor and your responsibility as children of God. Amen.