

***Deuteronomy 18:15-20***

***The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him.***

If you are a ‘tween or teen, when you saw the title for today’s sermon, you probably had some sort of reaction. Maybe it was a small smile, a nod of the head, a contemplative “hmmm,” or even a derisive grunt at the thought of a pandering preacher trying to “connect” with the kids.

And while I assure you that, for the sake of souls, I am not above pandering, my first thought of the title “Among us” was purely textual: ***The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.*** In fact, in a conversation with my oldest son, I toyed with the idea of never referencing the game at all, leaving those in the know wondering if I was so out of touch that I missed the opportunity to make a popular connection.

However, the more I thought about it, the more connections I saw. And so, here we are, searching *Among Us*. For those who don’t know, *Among Us* is an online multiplayer game that has players working together to fix their crumbling spaceship while figuring out who the imposters are trying to destroy it and them. It’s what’s known as a social deduction game, which means the game-play focuses on a conflict between two teams: the informed minority and the uninformed majority.

While this may sound complicated, it’s a pretty simple concept. At the start of each game, you’re randomly assigned the role of bad guy (a.k.a Imposter; an alien that looks like a good guy) or you’re assigned the role of a good guy (a.k.a. Crewmate). The Imposters know what role each player was assigned (i.e., they know who the other bad guys are), while the Crewmates are none the wiser. In order for Imposters to win, they

must wipe out all the Crewmates without getting caught. If the Crewmates want to win, they must either discover who the Imposters are and vote them off the ship, or finish repairing the ship by doing little tasks (simple mini-games) before the Imposters are able to wipe out everyone.

The only catch is that players are only allowed to talk to each other during emergency meetings. During a meeting, players discuss what they’ve seen and vote to either kick out a suspicious player or continue on without an elimination. However, Imposters will try their best to convince the other players that they’re one of the good guys, so players must use logic to see beyond the deception and make the right choices.

If you want to look at it another, its like a game of cosmic Clue. Instead of Mr. Body’s mansion you’re in a spaceship. And instead of colorful characters with self-reflective names, you are nameless characters in colorful spacesuits.

Regardless, this all seems a rather far cry from the wilderness of Moab, just East of the Jordan in the closing years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. But our text from Deuteronomy today places us in that very spot. Where we pick up the account, Moses has ably, faithfully, and humbly led the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, through the waters of the Red, and beyond the foot of Mt. Sinai. He has led them in the face of rebellion and attack. He has led them through starvation and despair. He has led them to find mercy and forgiveness. He has led them through life and death and life again. In fact, it is a whole new generation which stands before him, poised to enter the Promised land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

Though Moses himself would not enter it, the Promised land lay across the River Jordan, so close the people could taste it. And Moses takes one last opportunity to warn and guide, to affirm and encourage his dearly beloved people in the way of the

Lord. In fact, the Book of Deuteronomy is a collection of farewell sermons from Moses to the Children of Israel.

Some have looked at Deuteronomy as a second law, given 40 year after Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. In fact, the title *Deuteronomy* misleads in this direction. The *Septuagint*, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, translated verse 18 of chapter 17 as *second law* rather than *repeated law*. Jerome seized on this in his Latin *Vulgate* and the title stuck, *Deuteronomium*, or as we know it *Deuteronomy*.

But this is no second law. Moses knows what the People will face. They are about to settle in a pagan land. They will come face to face with temptation and idolatry. They will face imposters and deceivers. And they will no longer have Moses to guide them, rebuke them, plead for them, and most importantly, on God's behalf, forgive them. And so Moses reminds them of the wonders, the signs, the deliverance, and the guiding and protecting laws their parents and grandparents had received from the loving hand of their God of free and faithful grace. This was the time to assure an uncertain people, faced with the loss of Moses, that this same *Yahweh* would continue his gracious ways with the generations to come.

From the preamble to the epilogue, Moses points again and again to the covenant relationship the Children of Israel enjoyed with their Lord, the God of free and faithful grace. He recounts God's mighty deliverance time and again. He reviews the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws. He affirms the curses and blessings of the covenant relationship between God and his people. He lays out the succession plan for leadership in the new land. And he warns of the rebelliousness to come. (Cue the rumble of thunder and the flourish of brass, *bum bum, bummm.*)

I would imagine that an, Israelite taking it all in, having known no other

leader than Moses, having heard the promises and seen God's deliverance, this whole sermon of Moses could have been rather unsettling. I mean, a lot of the history Moses shared was about God's deliverance, yes, but most of the time it was deliverance from themselves – their own foolish choices, indulged weaknesses, and failing faith. The laws Moses reviewed certainly gave them something to strive for and a way to express their gratitude to God, and yet it was also a reminder of the heavy burden of sin with all the necessary fasting, sacrifices, and cleansing. And as for new leadership, Joshua was a faithful guy, a brilliant military man, a close friend and right hand to Moses...but he was no Moses. And while there was reassurance to be found in the Word of the Lord, everyone knew the stories of how terrifying it was to hear his actual voice. If there was rebellion as Moses predicted, and no Moses around to intercede and guide, who would stand between the people and the wrath of God? Who could they follow? Who could they listen to? Who would have it right? Where could they turn?

Do you sometimes feel that way, that you don't quite know what to do with yourself, which way to turn? Maybe it's the swirling and often contradicting pandemic and vaccine infor. Maybe it's the isolation of quarantines, masks, and social distancing. Maybe it's the hypocrisy of political games. Maybe it's the inequalities of society. Maybe it's the recurrence of a diagnosis. Maybe it's the failure of a venture. Maybe it's the betrayal of a friend. Maybe it's the death of loved one. Maybe it's the overwhelming impact of too much to do, the frustration of failed perfection, and purposelessness of boredom, or the tugging itch of longing for something...anything...else.

And so you turn to something...anything...that comes to mind...or to hand...or to heart...searching ...knowing...the truth is out there, sifting

through the imposters, falling for their lies and deceits, hoping that things will work out, desperately struggling, epically failing, maybe even hopelessly despairing...yet all the while actually knowing, by grace, through faith, that solution, direction, explanation, indeed salvation is right here...*Among Us*.

As you may recall, though we refer to so-called “books” of the Bible, for the most part, these ancient, divinely inspired writings we recorded on scrolls. These were pieces of papyri, stitched together into one long strip, and rolled up on wooden sticks called *umbilicum*. The papyrus strip was then rolled up on the sticks from outside edges toward the center.

At the same time, Hebrew writing is a bit like a drop of water into a still pool. The drop of the central theme hits and the waves of the book ripple out from there. So its no wonder then, that as one would unroll the scroll of Deuteronomy, the very first section that would be revealed would not only be the very center of the scroll, but the very center of the message.

And so it’s no wonder then that the most reassuring passage from Moses’ sermon would be right there as you unrolled the scroll. Yes, the clearest reference to how the Word of the Lord, not only would continue to come to his people, but a prophecy of how the Word of the Lord made flesh would come to his people, from *Among Us*. ***The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I command him.***

Not only does this promise from the Lord through Moses assure the people of his continued guidance through his chosen prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but also that there would be one unique prophet that

would remind the people of Moses, yet would fulfill all that Moses could not.

Where Moses proclaimed a two-sided covenant between God and his people, the Prophet would establish a new one-sided covenant of grace. Where Moses and the law demanded righteousness, the Prophet would come to give righteousness. Where Moses would offer sacrifices on behalf of the sins the people, the Prophet would *be* the sacrifice for the sins of the people. Where Moses would point to the Word of the Lord, the Prophet would be the Word of the Lord made flesh.

St. John explains in the first chapter of his Gospel, ***For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*** (1:17) And Peter would later preach in the temple courts, ***Moses said to the fathers: The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet from your brothers who is like me. Listen to everything he tells you...all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have talked about these days.*** (Acts 3:22-24)

Indeed, all of human history, from the fall...to the incarnation, pointed ahead to the coming of Jesus the Prophet, who, like Moses, would also be Priest and Ruler for his people. And yet, he is even more: The Prophet whose Word promises, guides, and strengthens; the Priest whose sacrifice covers our sin and purifies our hearts; the King who rules in our hearts and in our lives now and forever. This is who Jesus is – the Prophet, Priest and King – promised of old, since revealed...to the searching, the hurting, the longing... right here...right now...*Among Us*. ***Listen to him.*** Amen.