

# Among Your Own People

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning. Today's first scripture reading is from Deuteronomy 18, 15 through 18. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites.

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 our 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 fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth.

He will tell them everything I command him. And the second scripture reading is from Mark, chapter 1, verses 21 through 28. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as teachers of the law. Just then, a man in their synagogue, who was possessed by an impure spirit, cried out, What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

[ 1 : 24 ]     Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. Be quiet, said Jesus sternly. Come out of him.

The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, What is this?

A new teaching. And with authority, he even gives orders to impure spirits, and they obey him. News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So would you join me for a word of prayer? Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for this morning. Thanks for the ways in which your spirit is already at work among us.

And now, Lord, having opened ourselves to you in prayer and praise, pour into each of us afresh. Fall fresh on us, Lord. Give each of us what you know we need. All of this we lay before you.

[ 2 : 26 ]     In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So, becoming the people of God, and we're talking about from among our own people.

So, I want you to do a favor for me. Take your phone up. Take your phone up. I know it's a dangerous thing for preachers to ask. Okay? But take your phone up.

So, I want you to check. Now, I'm sure many of you are perfectly good tech heads, and you've already joined the wireless and all that good stuff. But I want you to see how many bars you have. Everybody's plugged in and connected.

Everybody can still get all their stuff. Yes? Now, the reason why I wanted you to think about that is I want you to remember when that wasn't a thing. I know there's a lot of us in this room that remember when that wasn't a thing.

Like, you couldn't be connected all the time. That you couldn't expect to get a text from your pharmacy in the middle of doing something else. You couldn't expect to have that work email show up while you were in the middle of watching a film.

[ 3 : 31 ] All those sorts of things. Right? But that's how we live now. And the reason I want you thinking about that is we're so used to it that we forget what it's like when we're not connected.

Right? Case in point. This just happened to me last week. Now, you guys know I was away last week. And while I was away, we were on our way home on Sunday night. And those of you who know me well know where my attention was Sunday night.

Right? So, I had the stream on my car. So, I'm listening to the game. Now, the way home that we took from where we were took us through the Allegheny National Forest where there are a lot of dead spots.

You'd have thought there was a global crisis happening in my car. Not only with me, but my wife, who happens to be a 49ers fan, was also having her own set of issues while this was going on.

So, but I want you to think about that, though, because we expect to stay connected. Right? That's where I want you to pay attention to. We expect to stay connected. And the thing is, we can do it so easily with ease.

[ 4 : 37 ] It's become fundamentally a part of who we are. The question I want you to pay attention to today is, do you wake up expecting to be connected to God the same way?

As you move through your day, is your heart open? Are your eyes open in a way that you are ready to receive whatever God is preparing to send?

Because we tend to look for God in the big and extraordinary all the time. But if it's just a regular day, a day where you don't have some big plan, or a day where you're not dealing with some major life crisis and you haven't been in prayer, especially because of it, are you still expecting God to talk to you, to engage you, to be a part of your regular everyday life, even when it's ordinary?

Because if you're struggling right now with that sense of, I don't know what God wants for me, or I have this question and I need an answer, I go back to what I was just saying.

How open are you? How conscious are you of being connected to the fact that God is engaged in your life, not just in the miraculous, but in the ordinary?

[ 6 : 04 ] You see, that's one of our hang-ups as we try to do this walk together with God. Because we keep expecting miracles, and God is still very much in the miracle business.

Don't take that off the table. But God doesn't always need a miracle to answer your question. God doesn't always need a miracle to get your attention.

He certainly shouldn't. And that's kind of the point. So we see that in our gospel story today. Now here's why I say that, because this does involve a miracle.

But at the same time, I want you to think about this. I want you to put yourself in the shoes of a first century person. You live in this small fishing village.

And you've gotten up, and you expect to go worship. You go to worship, and there's a guest preacher. Somebody you may have seen around town.

[ 7 : 05 ] Somebody you may have heard about. Yet, he starts teaching. And when he starts teaching, his teaching really resonates with you. That there's something about the way this guy is telling the story.

Something about the way this guy is opening the word to you, and it's hitting your heart different. Because he's doing this in a way that's strange to you. Because most of the other teachers you're used to are telling you what they've learned from other teachers.

Most of the other teachers aren't speaking definitively to hard life questions. Aren't making things as relatable to what you go through on a day-to-day basis.

They're just telling you these are the rules. This is what the story says. But this guy is doing something else. And while you are listening to this.

While he's got you in that particular place. And you're fixated on what he's saying. All of a sudden, somebody starts screaming in the back row. And when that person starts screaming and yelling in the back row.

[ 8 : 14 ] You get this sense that evil is clearly present. It disturbs you at the very pit of your spirit. You know it in your gut. Something is way, way off. And yet, this same preacher takes control of that situation.

Speaks authoritatively to the demon and casts the demon out. And what it does to your spirit. Now what I want you to pay attention to in that. I said, yes, that does involve an extraordinary peace.

But did you catch the first part? Of how you simply got up and did what you were going to do anyway. That there wasn't an expectation of something extraordinary.

And yet God spoke to you in that particular moment. See, that's the word that we sometimes overlook in our faith.

This idea of living in expectation. Living in connection. Living in this way that we know that no matter where we are.

[ 9 : 22 ] Our strength. Our receptivity. Is good. Right? Because that's part of our challenge.

You know, when we face crisis, we are open to the movement of God in ways that we're not usually open to it. But what about the everyday stuff? What about those times when it's not a particular fire that needs to be put out?

But that sense that you just want to be reassured that you're not alone. Maybe there's something on your heart and you need direction. Or maybe in this particular moment it's not so much that you need to celebrate something and you need to give God praise.

Or maybe it's not so much that there's an emergency that needs to be addressed. But you want to be reassured that you're not alone. Does it have to be something extraordinary that gets your attention?

Now, you know most of us in relationships, when you're in relationship with anyone, they shouldn't have to shout to get their message across to you all the time. Now, I'm going to leave that alone.

[ 10 : 44 ] Y'all can have that conversation later. Because I see people looking at each other and I'm like, I know we're going to leave that. Y'all handle that business on your own. But you know the point I'm trying to make.

That you don't have to always be at this volume in order to communicate. So why should God have to do that to you? That God can speak to you in that still small voice.

And still have the same power. Still have the same effect. See, listen to the story that you heard Renee read for us again. That piece from Deuteronomy. Now, when you hear that, what's going on is the people of Israel.

They've just gone through, not the entire exodus, but they've gone through being liberated from Egypt. They've seen God rain down the plagues on the superpower on earth at that time.

They've gone through the Red Sea parting. And now they're at the base of Mount Sinai. And at the base of Mount Sinai, what they look up and see is God on the mountain. What that means in other terms is fire and smoke and storm and all of this.

[ 11 : 56 ] And so when Moses does get them too, ready to cross into the promised land and he's rereading the law. That's what the book of Deuteronomy is about. It says, remember, there was a time when you guys looked up at the mountain and saw God.

And what you said was this. Let's reread the exact quote, right? It says, let us not hear the voice of our Lord, nor see his great fire anymore, or we will die.

You think about the narrow lane you're giving God to talk to you when that happens, though? So if God shows up in fire and flame and smoke, we're like, no, that's way too much. But if God shows up in a whisper, if God shows up in the voice of a friend, if God shows up in a reassuring presence in your spirit, or God puts a thought in your brain that tells you this is the answer to your question, you're like, I'm not sure that's God.

Do you see that narrow lane you're giving God? It's too big over here, but too small over here. The question is, where's that Goldilocks place in the middle? Because that's what you've done.

So the question is, how do you make sure that you are open to the movement of God all the time, no matter how God chooses to speak to you?

[ 13 : 20 ] See, we're so used to blaming it on the signal strength, right? In other words, we're going through the forest, and it's like, I can't pick up the stream anymore. God does not have a problem communicating.

We have a problem listening. And that's what we have to focus on. So, friends, in a practical way, what you have to do is, when you get up in the morning, or when you're walking through your days, you have to just check in on yourself.

Make sure that if you are listening for God, that you are conscious about listening for God. That if you don't expect God to speak to you, don't be surprised that you haven't heard from God.

Not because God hasn't said anything, but because you weren't expecting a message. And so you weren't paying attention when God probably sent it. That's what you have to open yourself up to.

Live in expectation. Because you hear the title of this message. From among your own people. What was interesting about that is when God says that to Moses, he says he hears the people crying out, and he says, you know, that's a good idea.

[ 14 : 39 ] Since they don't want to see me in the big way, I'll make sure I send regular people to them. Prophets. Right? I'll send regular people. Now the irony is, is how people tend to treat and obey prophets.

Right? Remember, that was one of the challenges for Jesus. That people wouldn't believe he was the Messiah because he was too ordinary. He came from that little hick town up north.

That he was a carpenter who didn't do, you know, something huge. He wasn't some mighty military leader and that sort of thing. He was too ordinary to be the Messiah.

Think about that. But you know what it's like to have God come to you softly. To get that surprise text from a friend when you're feeling low.

To have that stranger in line at Wegmans say just the right thing. To have the song that will lift your heart come on the radio just when you need it. All of these ways God comes to us softly.

[ 15 : 53 ] The question is, do we recognize that it's God? And that's an us thing, not a God thing. So if you're feeling disconnected.

If you're feeling like maybe God hasn't said anything to you. Make sure your phone is on. Because that is usually the issue.

If you're living in expectation of hearing from God. Trust me. God will reach out to you. And all that you are seeking.

All that you need. All that you desire. Will be handled by him. Amen. And amen.

Loving God, thank you for the ways in which you work among all of us. The ways in which your spirit continues to pour into each of us. That we get the blessing of living in this time where our connection to you is direct.

[ 16 : 57 ] And nothing gets in the way except our own lack of focus. Lord God, keep our hearts open. Because we need you. We know it from the very pit of who we are.

We need you. That we can't do this life without you. That not only in our most urgent and serious moments. And not just when our hearts are thrown open in praise because we're celebrating something.

But as we move through the drudgery of days. When we wake up and aren't expecting something extraordinary. That doesn't mean you won't move in the ordinary.

The sunshine on our face. The beauty of a garden. The smile of a friend or a stranger. You shining through in all these different ways to remind us that you are with us.

The way you answer our questions simply by placing that knowledge in our spirits. Or simply giving us direction and wisdom from other places.

[ 18 : 03 ] Lord, we thank you. We thank you and we praise you that you care about the small stuff. Just as much as the big stuff. And that you don't need to shout and scream.

And you don't need to do big grand gestures. To do exactly what you know we need. Thank you, Lord. That we know you in this way.

Thank you that you are who you are. Thank you. Thank you. That because you work in us and remind us this way. That you also use us to be blessings to others.

Lord God, help us to build a world where all can see you reflected through us. By the things we do to build a world of justice and peace. By the things we do to show care and love to those who feel alone or those who need help.

Work in us, Lord. Not only work in us. But thank you for working around us and in us as well. All of this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 04 ] Amen. Amen. God moves in your life. God moves through your life. Be open to the movement of God through extraordinary gestures as well as things that are quiet.

More calm. More ordinary. And more regular. Know that God is always on the move. That said, as you think of ways in which to put your faith into action this week. We have so much that's happening around the church.

One of the things we want to make sure we call your attention to is the Red Blazers concert coming up this Friday. All tickets that are being sold for this will go support some ministries at the church. So if you are able to join us on Friday night, please do.

As this continues to support ways in which we make guests to the church feel more welcome. As well as helping people with visitation. We also have our regular Bible studies that we'll be meeting on Thursday as well.

And so if you are able to join us, this will be our last conversation before Lent begins. And then we're moving into a different study after that. But this study has been great. And you don't have to have attended the previous weeks in order to get something out of this week.

[ 20 : 08 ] So if you're able to join us at 11 or 7, please do for the Bible studies coming up. We also have a couple of drives going on. There's a notice in your bulletin about saving Christmas cards for veterans.

There's the list for the next Feeding Hope meal, which is in there as well. So there's a whole lot happening. Use your bulletin. It's a resource. And for those of you who are online, trust the website as well.

That said, let's receive our benediction. Know that God works in many mysterious ways. Keep your heart. Keep your eyes.

Keep your spirit open to the movement of God and watch him work in your life. Now in the name of God, our creator and king. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior.

And in the name of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our sustainer. May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. And all God's people said, amen.