

**NO SIN**  
**1 John 1:9**

She was born Lydia Emma Pinckert in Medford, Wisconsin – one of 10 children. She considered herself a devout Roman Catholic and believed that she had been given psychic abilities. In Parade magazine in 1956 she predicted that the President who was elected in 1960 would be assassinated and that he would be a Democrat. That was John F. Kennedy. Everyone was impressed. She had numerous other examples of being dramatically correct; but also far more epic failures. Do any of you know the more common name by which she was known? (Jean Dixon)

Yes, Jean died in 1997. She used to be a regular feature on New Year's Eve specials and even was entertained by the Nixons and Reagans in the White House as an advisor during their presidencies. But by 1990 she had so many unfulfilled "prophecies" that no one really took her seriously any more. Her predictions were relegated to the National Enquirer right next to the horoscopes and the Jumble.

If I were to ask you what the role of a prophet is, I'm going to guess that a Jean Dixon-like person is what might come to mind for many of you. But, more likely, someone who actually predicts the future with absolute success. After all, Biblically, you think of Isaiah, who spoke of Jesus' death as the Savior nearly 800 years before it happened. You think of Micah, who predicted the place of Jesus birth. Hosea, who predicted his resurrection after three days. Joel, who predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Or maybe you think of the dream translators like Joseph, who predicted Egypt's future during a drought. Or Daniel, who understood the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.

And you are correct – these men ARE prophets. And they did predict the future as a part of their ministry. But predicting the future is only a small part of what they did in their role as prophet. Primarily they were called by God not to prognosticate the future, but to call God's people to holy living in the present.

The Lutheran Cyclopedia defines a prophet as one "who is divinely inspired to rebuke sin shows God's mercy, and in general to proclaims messages of God. He does this in association with events of the past, present, and future, with constant emphasis on God's acts of grace; hence the Messiah has the most prominent place in prophecy."

In short: A prophet is one who speaks for God – who proclaims his message. And sometimes that message is about the “far off.” But more often than not, the message is about the “here and now.”

The modern pastor, such as yours truly, is not a prophet in the sense that prophets were divinely inspired to say what they said; and I would never presume to tell you that my personal words to you are divinely inspired. Stick to the Scriptures for that which you can count on being divinely inspired.

Nevertheless, my primary calling to you, as your pastor, like a prophet, is not to just tell you, in general terms, about your heavenly future, but to give guidance for your present walk with the Lord. As the Cyclopedia says of the role of prophets, so I would say of pastors: “to rebuke sin, show God’s mercy, and proclaim the messages of God” to you.

Let’s think about that in further detail by looking at the three parts of the messengers calling:

**1) To rebuke sin.** (Train setup on table in front) The messenger of God is called by Him to lift up God’s law as the norm and guide for our living. When someone strays from God’s ways, that is, when they go off the track and head toward danger and evil, the messenger is called to do help do this (put the train back on the track): to help the sinner get back on track.

Now this is not such a popular role today, and many pastors have the sincere desire to forget about this part of their calling. In the modern world, to challenge someone’s ideas about how to live is considered judgmental and intolerant. Particularly is this true in moral and ethical decisions. In truth, most people want to do what they want to do and they don’t want someone else telling them that God has a standard. Many would rather stay off the track because they want to live as they please.

But the one who speaks for God is called by Him not just to make people happy and tell them what they want to hear, but to lift up God’s standards and guidelines as those which will bring blessing and benefit. If you take God’s word seriously, there IS right and wrong, there IS good and bad. There IS objective truth. And God’s messenger should be sharing that message with His people – even if it makes them angry sometimes.

As our text proclaims, “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So, whether it comes to gossip or lust – jealousy or anger – greed or pride – whether God’s messenger is discussing drunkenness or sexuality, selfishness or stewardship, the value of life or the sanctity of marriage, he is called to faithfully share God’s word that challenges His people to holy living in these areas. And all this not because he presumes himself to be a judge of others, but because his calling is to speak what God would speak.

Role 1: Rebuking sin.

**2) To show God’s mercy.** While confronting sin and speaking God’s law is probably the hardest role for the messenger of God; without a doubt, every messenger of God’s favorite role is to speak about God’s mercy and forgiveness – to share with people the fact that God Himself, in Jesus Christ, came into our world so that He could save YOU from sin and death – so that He could set YOU free from darkness and open for you the treasures of His love.

There is nothing that gives me greater pleasure than proclaiming to repentant sinners the beautiful words, “upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins.”

I remember recently seeing someone come to the door of the church lugging more than one load of stuff for a rummage sale and trying to open the door at the same time. As I ran to the door to open it for us and then grabbed some of the many items he was balancing in his hands, it was so great to see the look of relief upon his face as I lifted some of those burdens off of his shoulders.

That’s what it’s like to be able to share the Gospel of Jesus. You look out at people’s faces and you can see relief, you can see comfort, you can see joy as the burden of sin is lifted off their shoulders and they hear the Good News that our Savior paid the price for all sin for all of time – that there is nothing in all creation that can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Role 2: Showing God’s mercy.

Then there's the third role of God's messenger – the third calling that he has in representing God to the people. It is this:

**3) To proclaim the message of God – His acts throughout history and His work among us now.**

God's role in our world is not just about having our sins forgiven and receiving the promise of eternal life. No. As you read through the Bible you see how God is constantly at work leading people onward through their journey of faith. He is there to bring guidance. He is there to bring wisdom. He is there to bring comfort, joy, strength, hope, and peace.

Jesus says it himself, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

It is the privilege of God's messenger to recount God's loving, saving, and motivating acts to those, in the world, who can so easily get beaten down by the struggles and pains that we face. Sickness and disease. Pain and suffering. Acts of violence, terror, bloodshed, war – losses, heartache, injustice. The list can go on and on.

But the messenger of God has the privilege of declaring God's work through history – in the Bible, and in the lives of His people through the years. From Adam to Noah. From David to Jeremiah. From St. Paul, to Martin Luther. From Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Richard Wurmbrand to Billy Graham – to each and every one of God. God's faithfulness, His love, His generosity ring through the pages of His word, through the life of the Church, and in the life of God's people today.

Role 3: Proclaiming the mighty acts of God.

- 1) Rebuking sin.
- 2) Showing God's mercy.
- 3) Proclaiming the mighty acts of God.

You know what? This isn't only the honor and privilege of prophets, pastors and priests. While those guys, (us guys) get to do it in a public forum and as part of a calling, in truth everyone has the calling to be a disciple of Christ. And that means that you, too, when you call yourself a child of God, are raised up by him to do these things in personal and meaningful ways.

You can help an erring brother or sister get back on track. – When you see someone caught in the trap of their own sin – stuck in the mire of their own making, you can help them come to the realization that they need some help – that they need a God to help them get out of the trap.

You can declare God’s forgiveness and grace to a repentant one who needs the comfort of the Gospel. When a sinner repents, it is your privilege as a representative of Christ Jesus, to speak what God would speak to them: love, mercy and forgiveness.

And you can declare the mighty acts and works of God. Every day you can encourage not only other believers, but also those who do not know the Lord, by sharing with them what God has done throughout history and what He has been doing for you.

In truth, that’s what the Church is. Look at our Acts lesson.

*32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

There, you see it at work, vibrantly, beautifully -- brothers and sisters in Christ representing Him to one another and to the world. May God bless all of us to fulfill our calling as disciples and as messengers. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.