

**TEXT: Deuteronomy 18:15-20, Mark 1:21-28**

**TOPIC: Through prophetic voices, God invites people to the way of accountability even when uncomfortable.**

**SUBJECT: God's peculiar way of accountability invites people to see not from advantage, but disadvantage.**

**TITLE: The Way of Accountability**

This morning I want to start by inviting answers to two questions.

First, where is God at work among us? *Where is God at work among us?* Be specific as we talk about this.

DISCUSS

Here's the second question. What ministry is God inviting you into? *What ministry is God inviting you into?* Again, be specific.

DISCUSS

As surprising as it may sound, recognizing where God is at work and recognizing where God is inviting us into ministry, says something about how receptive we are to the way of accountability. When we notice how God is at work among us, we discover the gifts, skills, and assets necessary to celebrate together as the community where God's love reigns.

That being said, let's pray.

PRAYER

For me, the way of accountability is about God coming to share something God needs you to learn or do. Generally, I think, people learn best when they are humble and receptive enough to listen for what God has to say, whether through devotional work, interaction with others, or among those who are historically overlooked.

I am intentional looking for the ways God repeats something over and over in my life. Just the other day, I read three completely separate devotions that all seemed to hone in on the same message. And Friday and Saturday, I had three friends who don't even know each

other suggest the way of accountability to me by checking in to see how I am and where things are in my life. When I was in seminary, my New Testament professor used to say that, “if it’s repeated, it must be important.” While he was referring to nuances in scripture, I’ve found the same is generally true in life, particularly when God’s way of accountability comes into play.

Throughout time, God’s way of accountability has often been expressed through visionary prophets when people struggled to embrace the necessary vulnerability and courage to be as God intends. Historically, prophets were often killed by the people God had sent them to serve, particularly when people did not want to embrace the way of accountability. On a certain level, I’ve experienced that, personally, at times when I’ve had to be prophetic; I’ve served a few people who wanted my head on a platter. What I did not know, however, is that prophets were usually lower-class critics of the religious hierarchy, which means prophets are people who can empathize or even relate to whatever issue is at hand.

So why all the talk about prophets? Partially because every person has a prophetic capacity. Did you hear that? *Every person has a prophetic capacity.* Equally important is how consistent people are in how they practice the way of accountability. For instance, how often does one group of people compare itself to another group of people and either become afraid of the group that isn’t theirs? How willing are people to seek God’s guidance in living with a humility that opens doors for understanding others who are not like them – such as the poor or people emigrating from poverty, hostility and violence? How willing is one group of people to take risks of faith when the risks scare the dickens out of them and sometimes even make them unpopular, even when the risks taken represent what’s necessary and right?

Where do you fall in that spectrum? Where should you? Are they the same? How you answer that, speaks to whether you are choosing the way of accountability God intends for you or living a life controlled by fear, anxiety and a refusal to be vulnerable and courageous.

Just as God holds prophets accountable, God invites us to the way of accountability, as well. And the way of accountability is far more than it sounds because the way of accountability isn't just to God. The way of accountability is about being accountable in love with God's representation in every person, and the way of accountability means embracing principles and values supported by healthy interpretations of scripture which have clearly shown how the way of accountability has worked historically.

Think about it. Of all the peoples of the ancient Middle Eastern world, only the Jewish people can claim a culture that has survived continuously for 3,000 years. No longer are there Jebusites, Moabites, Ammonites or Hittites, but there are still Jews. Perhaps the key to the way of accountability, then, has something to do with what's found in the Torah that both nurtures personal as well as communal accountability.

The way of accountability God gives us is often vastly different from what we might expect. God's ways are not our ways and our ways are not God's ways, just as Isaiah suggests.

The way of accountability is an expression of God's grace. One of the best explanations I've seen recently was in this past Monday's *Upper Room*, where its author ascertained how God works through (or is working through) addictions, brokenness, heartache, traumas, selfishness, (and I would add grief) to call us toward healing. Healing has every bit to do with the way of accountability. Healing makes it possible for people to experience the call within their call or the direction within their conversion.

The way of accountability heals people from addictions, and the way of accountability heals those who have experienced trauma, and healed people, heal people.

The way of accountability transforms brokenness into artwork, much like the Japanese art kintsugi.

The way of accountability replaces heartbreak with happiness because when there is less of you, there's more room for God.

The way of accountability is selflessness where selfishness once thrived.

The way of accountability uses grief to bring forth joy and sometimes redirect love.

And perhaps most of all, the way of accountability becomes a call within your call or a mission within your conversion. For me, the way of accountability is God's way of inviting us to live into God's intentions and God's purposes. Good chance within your experience there's something that seems difficult that God's just waiting to use to bless you and others. After all, God has this uncanny way of coming into our lives, never leaving, all the while patiently waiting for the moment you realize what the way God's accountability of you is waiting to take you.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.