

On Being Prophetic  
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 8  
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
2 July 2023

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Jeremiah 28:5-9  
Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18  
Romans 6:12-23  
St. Matthew 10:40-42

INI

Last Sunday we talked a bit about the prophets, and by extension about being prophetic. It would be good for us to have a more complete understanding about the word prophet, and what prophecy means and is. One of the problems we have with understanding the prophets is the very word that we use to describe them. Our word "prophet" comes from the Greek combination of *pro* (in advance of) and the verb *phesein* (to speak or tell), thus *prophetes*. The Hebrew, however, has a different aspect to it. The word is *navi*, or spokesperson. This understanding has not so much to do with the future as it does with whatever God wants communicated or expressed. It is best described in [Deuteronomy 18:18](#), "*and will put my words into the mouth of the prophet; the prophet shall tell them all that I command.*" In order to communicate the divine messages that had been put upon them, the prophets often used more than words to communicate these messages. Isaiah used the names of his children, and Jeremiah used a pot, linen belt, or yoke bar. This is the image that Jeremiah calls to mind as he speaks with Hananiah, the prophet in the Temple despoiled by the Babylonians. Jeremiah talks about the yoke, the bar of wood that bound oxen together, and in his prophecy, he speaks of the "yoke of Babylon.

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will restore to this place all the vessels of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took from this place and carried away to Babylon. And Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, I will bring back to this place—oracle of the LORD—for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."*

Here the message is not to the future or even about the future necessarily but rather God's word to the here and now. When we think of prophets in our own time, we hear them often addressing a political or social situation. Thus we can see Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., or Harvey Milk as being prophetic. Prophetic men and women have graced our churches, legislatures, and society in general. Now we need to address how our preaching and witnessing can be prophetic?

In Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew he talks about being welcomed. He strikes an amazing image of our participation with Jesus, *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*" We are part of the equation, we are part of the message, the good news. We are prophets speaking to the here and now

of God's salvation given to humankind. Jesus mentions three types how are specifically welcomed: the welcomed prophet, the welcomed righteous person, and finally (and we really need to take this one to heart) the welcomed little one. Let's understand this list that Jesus shows to us. The welcomed prophet – is an exact opposite of what the situation actually was. Jesus often accuses Jerusalem of "killing the prophets." If we were to take the time and relive the story of Jeremiah, the prophet we could understand Jesus' accusation. Jeremiah took a political stance that pleased neither king nor other prophets. In the political argument about making an alliance with either Babylon or Egypt, Jeremiah encouraged Israel to ally itself with God. This prophecy fell upon deaf ears, and Jeremiah was threatened with death. He was not alone in this regard. Other prophets were likewise threatened, and this Jesus' accusation. The welcomed prophet is a prophet whose message is welcomed and understood.

The second one who is welcomed is the righteous person. A good example here is Dorothy Day, a social activist and journalist (speaking God's word to the here and now) who without abandoning her social beliefs and prophetic teachings became an ardent Roman Catholic. She founded the newspaper *The Catholic Worker*, which gave her a platform to address numerous social issues. Pope Benedict XVI described her life, "as an example of a journey toward faith...in a secularized environment." Much the same could be said of Martin Luther King Jr., and countless others who spoke out against evil. I'm remembering the visit I made as a young man to Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial in Jerusalem where a garden of the righteous honors all the gentiles who stood up for Jews threatened by Nazi's in Europe. People who visited the south during Civil Rights Marches also come to mind.

Finally, there is a startling addition – *These little ones*. It is here that Matthew mirrors the message of Luke in his Gospel. He is constantly mentioning the *anawim* – *the little ones* in his recounting of Jesus' message. Here, in Matthew, Jesus has the same comment, our offering of a glass of water is seen as the righteous welcoming act. So then, who are the little ones who surround us, who walk by this church on a daily basis, for whom we made sandwiches before the service to today? We will oftentimes not see them or recognize them, but we can be of service to them. Our message to the here and now is one of service to those who need so much.

I like the translation in the New American Bible – "Whoever receives you receives me." Welcoming leaves the one coming to us still outside of us, but reception takes that one in – into our very selves. We might wonder how we might receive Jesus in our lives, and Jesus gives us the possibility of three sources: the prophet (a preacher?), the righteous one (a follower, a disciple?), and the surprising third, one of these little ones, showing how in our work of ministry, even the hearer can teach us and give us a vision of the Christ. What a message for our times, which call us to look at every man and every woman as a field "white unto harvest."

SDG