

LIVING A PROPHETIC LIFE

On this Labor Day Sunday, I'd like to introduce into the Lake Edge lexicon the twin phrases "*living prophetically*" and "*living a prophetic life*." I'll be using these two phrases interchangeably this morning.

Usually when we hear about anything having to do with prophets or prophecy, we tend to excuse ourselves from consideration of being used in such a way; and, depending on how we were raised, we might just close our mouths, raise our spiritual antennae, and begin to be on the look-out for the Holy Ghost doing its own thing right in our midst! (You know the Holy Ghost is always doing something right in our midst, don't you?) Or, we may just skeptically suck our teeth at the many "imposter prophets" on the airwaves and social media as well as right here in our neighborhood who claim that God told them this and God told them that—claims that usually end with a solicitation of money!

This morning I'd like to help us broaden our understanding of what I believe being prophetic is. I'd like to take some of the fear out of it for

some of us, because—technically speaking—you don't have to *BE a prophet* in order to *live prophetically*. *Being a prophet* is a spiritual gift that is given to those who are chosen to speak for God by divine inspiration or special revelation. *Living prophetically, or living a prophetic life*, is living a life that is seeking to live out among us the values that the prophet proclaims from God. So, you don't have to have the gift of prophecy to live prophetically. You can live a prophetic life, seeking to live out the values of God's kingdom, no matter *who* you are or *what* your spiritual gift is.

So, I'd like to briefly use our three printed scripture lessons today—from Jeremiah 15, Romans 12, and Matthew 16—to talk a bit about what some of those kingdom values are, and how we are encouraged to use them to live what I would like for us to call “prophetic lives.”

II.

Let me first introduce you to the *pathos of a prophet*. The pathos of a prophet includes a consciousness filled with the conflicting emotions that being a carrier of God's Word brings. God's words are always words of love, but they can be a two-edged sword for both God's people as well as for God's prophet, because God's words can bring joy AND judgement.

The words of Jeremiah talking to God today remind some of us why we have *no desire* to be a prophet for God in the first place: (v.15) "*know that on your account, I suffer insult.*" (v.18) "*Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail.*"

Jeremiah is basically telling God that this being a prophet life is for the birds! He tells God "*It's wreaking havoc with my emotions; I can't sleep; I'm full of joy one minute, agitated and angry the next; first I'm feeling completely covered by you, then I'm feeling utterly abandoned*

by you; I'm lamenting and crying for others even while I'm being persecuted and rejected on my OWN side of the street; my pain from being rejected and ridiculed because of your word doesn't stop, my wounds from being beaten down and black-listed because of your word don't heal; and you seem to me like a royal jester, O God, while you have me out here feeling like a great big joke!"

The pathos, that intense emotion that Jeremiah is expressing includes the laments for others as well as for himself. Jeremiah is reminding us that part of not only being a prophet, but part of living a prophetic life—whether you're a prophet or not—is having a *deep compassion* for God's people (including the ones that are going to reject you), and a *deep delight* for God's word (v.16: *"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart."*) Having a deep delight for God's word, *even while you're being dragged through the mud because of representing that word.*

Because, Beloved, it is GUARANTEED that as you seek to live a prophetic life, a life that speaks God's values into this world in which we live not only with our words but with our actions, you will be *rejected and ridiculed, forsaken and forgotten, disappointed and delegitimized.*

Jeremiah reminds us today of part of what living a prophetic life is all about. And for the living of these days, Lord knows we could use some prophetic lives. Because it looks like things are about to get serious . . .

III.

Why does living a prophetic life keep one so tired and challenged, and in so much trouble with the world? What is it about living a prophetic life that guarantees anger and rejection on the part of most others?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he speaks about the dangerous values and uses offensive four-letter words that tend to drive the world crazy, but which should be hallmarks of the way Christians treat those both inside and outside of the Christian communion. Paul uses offensive

four-letter words like *love, hope, and good*; he speaks of subversive concepts like *persevering in prayer, hating what is evil, and loving your enemies*. He espouses dangerous values like *extending hospitality to strangers, blessing those who persecute you, and living in harmony with one another*.

These are the words, concepts and values that the Judeo-Christian community has always been taught to cherish, delight in, and live by. They were announced by the prophets of Israel, passed down by the ministry of Jesus, and are part of what we who have decided to follow Jesus strive to do as we seek to live our lives prophetically.

Those may be the ways of the church—at least on paper—but they are not the ways of the world-in-action. Contrary to what Paul was teaching the Roman Christian community about how to treat one another, in the world love is NOT genuine, evil is NOT hated, and people seek to outdo one another in everything EXCEPT showing honor to one another. In the world *hope* is squashed, *patience* is seen as

weakness, and *strangers* are often armed and extremely dangerous. In the world *harmony* is not sought, *vengeance* is pursued rather than *peace*, and enemies are not burned with shame, they are burned with *fire*.

Not only do most people of the world not live out the values of a prophetic life, they also hate to see YOU living out the values of a prophetic life—because they are afraid that your way of living is eventually going to try to get them or shame them into giving up something for the sake of someone else who they don't think is equal to them anyhow, or deserving anyhow, or worthy anyhow.

People are very reluctant to give up both their property and their power. In our human zeal to own and control, we forget that nothing really belongs to us; it all belongs to God! But Paul reminds us today what living a prophetic life in the midst of a power-hungry and property-hungry world is all about. And for the living of these days, we could use some more people living out prophetic lives.

Because it looks like things are about to get serious . . .

IV.

Don't you think that is what Jesus is trying to tell his disciples in Matthew's gospel this morning, when he talks about going to Jerusalem, undergoing great suffering at the hands of the religious and political status quo, and being killed? He's saying to those who are following him *"Hey y'all, listen up, 'cuz it's about to get serious!"*?

Don't you think that's what Jesus is trying to tell Peter—the "rock" that Jesus said he would build his church upon—when he said *"You're not getting it Peter! You're not seeing the big picture! Listen up, 'cuz it's about to get serious!"*?

Don't you think that is what the Lord of the Church and the Lord of the world might be trying to tell us this morning, that those who want to be followers of Jesus for the living of these days should take up their cross by seeking to live a prophetic life in the midst of this world; a life that

stands for, lives for, and is willing to die for the values of the kingdom of God that are intended for us ALL to partake of?

Living a prophetic life is living a life that loves others; a life that doesn't put obstacles in anyone's way; a life that finds ways to support just systems that makes love and mercy something that touches somebody!

Living a prophetic life is living a life that stands up for the equality of us all, no matter our gender, race, ethnicity or ability!

Living a prophetic life is living a life whose values cut against the grain of the values of the world; a life whose priorities are centered on the peace and well-being of the world, the sharing of the abundant resources God has graciously given to us all, and the creative sharing of the ethic of love.

Living a prophetic life is living a life that shouts against injustice, that rails against mistreatment, that screams against intolerance, that has a tantrum against the greed that abuses most of God's people by a precious few of God's people.

V.

But living a prophetic life is not just actively living in dissent of the unjust ways of the world. Living prophetically is also knowing and living, with a blessed assurance, the hope for a better future that is possible with a God who can change things!

A God who can hear our moans and groans of prayer and lament, and turn them into release and new life.

A God like the God of Jeremiah, who can take us back when we're mad, lift us up when we're sad, deliver us when we are weak, rescue us when we are lost, and heal us when we are hurting.

A God like Paul's God, who rejoices with us, weeps with us, teaches us justice, and fights our battles.

A God like the God of Jesus, who reminds us of a bigger picture than just this life, but a bigger picture that includes this life. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus reminds us that this is not all that there is.

But while we live in this is-ness, let us live prophetically, living out the

values of the kingdom of God as preached and passed on and lived out by Jesus.

Because just like it did for Jesus and his followers 2,000 years ago, things all around us are about to get more serious than they already are. And we could use some people who are living prophetic lives . . .

Amen.

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