

EVERYDAY PROPHETS

2/11/18~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Epiphany-Last (B): 2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

Have you ever thought of yourself as a prophet? I'm guessing most of us would say, "There's no way I could be a prophet. I can't see the future; I'm not a prophet." We typically envision a prophet as someone who is given a crystal-clear image of how the world could be transformed and, then, basically rebukes others, warning them to change their conduct or face the wrath of God.

In many ways, that is what a prophet does, but not to such extremes. In order to understand the vision they are given, a prophet has to be very connected to the world around them. A prophet, instead of some far-removed hermit, who sees a vision and shouts it out, is actually someone who sees the pain in the world around them, and the ways that pain could be removed, or at least lessened. In this connection to the world—in this openness to pain—a prophet is very vulnerable.

The message received and delivered by a prophet is divinely inspired, but divine inspiration is not limited to an elect group of people having mountaintop moments. Interestingly enough, poets were once thought to be included in the realm of prophets, because poetry was believed to come straight from God.

Another way of thinking of a prophet is someone who can uncover that which is hidden in the world around us. So the idea of a poet being a prophet makes sense to me—the way something can be captured in metaphor and analogy that has no other way of being articulated.

Two of our readings this morning have to do with prophets and what seem to be mountaintop experiences. But I want to suggest that these stories are not necessarily "mountain top moments" in the way we might think of them; nor are the prophets so different from you and me. Instead, these are both stories about pain being transformed into power.

It's important that we make these kinds of connections, because otherwise they are just two more stories that we, "mere mortals", can't relate to. And, then, we miss out on the opportunity to notice the places in our lives where we are divinely inspired and where our pain—or someone else's—might be transformed into power.

I contemplate the difference between "mountaintop moments" and everyday life when I watch a sunrise or walk on the beach at sunset. I'm intrigued by how many of us gather to savor the sunset. Everyone is ooo-ing and ah-ing as if we're watching fireworks that only set-off once a year.

But, in reality, a sunrise or a sunset isn't really that amazing. The sun sets and then rises again every single day, in what some would call "a very mundane pattern". We can count on it; we can track it. The colors might change, depending on the atmospheric conditions, but the sun still sets each and every day.

Similarly, these stories are not "mountaintop moments", rather they take place in the mundane of everyday life. I say everyday, because in both stories the participants are dealing with grief and loss. Someone's going to be dying and leaving, and those who will be left behind are struggling to imagine how they'll get along without that person in their midst.

We've all been there, right? It's that place where we know the inevitable is about to happen, but we absolutely do NOT want our beloved mentor, friend, or companion to go. We want them to be with us always, so we do some haggling about what could happen instead.

In Elisha's case, he says, "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit." His words indicate what he respects and loves about Elijah, as well as demonstrates to Elijah that he's committed to keep his mentor's legacy alive: "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit." In Peter's case—whether aware consciously or not that Jesus won't be with them forever—he wants to memorialize them having been there by building three chairs.

On the other hand, these stories do take place outside the boundaries of regular, everyday life. They occur in what are sometimes called "thin places". The Celts say thin places are where the veil is removed from our eyes, and there's no longer any distance between heaven and earth.

At the same time—similar to the qualities of being prophetic—thin places are rooted in deep vulnerability. One author describes it as "a place where we have less control and where the unpredictable becomes the means of discovery." In thin places, we are more likely to be aware of divine inspiration.

In those places—whether a loved one is dying, or a baby is born, or we stand in the middle of a magnificent forest—we let our guard down in thin places—and what's really important in life bubbles up to the surface. Or in some cases, what's really important is all we can focus on in that moment. A prophet, then, is more likely to hang out in those thin spaces, noticing the pain in the world, and hearing God's call to do something about it.

Sometimes being prophetic sounds very visionary; they are the ones who say, even though we shouldn't get involved in politics, the church must speak out against the Holocaust and Hitler—that we must be a place of refuge for those who escape such atrocities. They are the ones who say we have to stand up for civil rights.

Prophets are the ones who say Jesus taught us many things, but most importantly he taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves. They are the ones who live with the knowledge, as the Apostle Paul says, that it is our God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" and "who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge" to others.

A few weeks ago I was invited to give the invocation at the kick-off of the season of non-violence, and there I heard a prophet speak. Her name is Jamie January, and if you saw her on the street, you wouldn't realize she was a prophet. She told us her story of having escaped from a human trafficking ring for the 8th time.

She hopes this will be the last time, but she is also very realistic that it might not be. She didn't explain how she keeps getting sucked back in, but what we did hear is her prophetic voice ringing out that she is not a prostitute, rather she has been prostituted, and that she has come to realize that, despite what's happening around her, she can rely on God's voice in her head and heart proclaiming, "You deserve love; you deserve happiness; you deserve joy."

With the help of a program called "Sisters on the Street," Jaime's pain has been transformed into power. And, now, as she tells her story, exposing human trafficking in North County, she is helping transform the pain of others into power, by bringing light to this horrible situation. Divine inspiration is present throughout her story.

Being prophetic doesn't always show up in the form of voice. We've been talking about transforming pain into power with the confirmation students and their parents, over the past month. A story that was shared reveals that sometimes we're prophetic with our hearts and intentions.

One of the parents told us about a community of women who came together to support a friend dying from a terminal disease. He described how tragic her disease was, and yet how beautiful it was to watch her being supported by her friends. Although there wasn't a prophet standing on a mountaintop shouting, those women were announcing to the world that no one should die alone.

Sometimes it's our actions that ring out in a prophetic way. In my own life, I think of the time when I watched a little girl from the orphanage in Honduras be separated from her mother. I wasn't able to speak to her in Spanish, but I could hug her, and as I held her tightly, waiting for the sobs to shift into heavy sighs, my actions declared, "You belong with us. You are loved."

So, yes, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus and the others, they are all prophets. But the prophetic and divine inspiration—or revelation—are all wound up together, here in creation. God's revelation happens through us so that we, and the people around us, can come to better know God.

Maybe your life's work is not being a prophet, but we need your prophetic voice, your prophetic vision...your prophetic heart...here in this creation. That's the gift of Epiphany, that we bring God's light into the darkness of the world. We are the gift, prophetically demanding justice, respect and dignity for all. Prophets in the mundane of everyday life, transforming pain into power.

-AMEN

Collect of the Day:

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Kings 2:1-12

2Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." ⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." ⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Psalm 50

¹The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

²Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

³Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him.

⁴He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

⁵“Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

⁶The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

⁶For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9:2-9

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.