

Times of the Prophet

Even though many of my relatives and family attended charismatic churches I grew up in a hybrid. The worship was somewhere between a good hell fire Baptist service and the faith healing of the best charismatics.

Our faith healers however were not like the ones I saw on television. They were nothing like Jimmy Swaggert, Oral Roberts, or Robert Tilton. Our pastors and deacons lacked the showmanship of those clergy. They were told that someone had an ailment, they would come forward during the altar call, and the pastor would anoint them on the forehead with oil. Deacons would come a lay hand on the sick as the preacher prayed.

Of course on television this would not make good ratings. I remember watching Praise the Lord for hours. I was mesmerized by these performers...I mean...evangelists. I was impressionable and thought they were incredibly entertaining.

The only thing that I could compare it to was when my mother was making things and the big show that she sold her crafts was the week of the Nebraska State Fair. I would be there to help her set up and then had a good portion of the time to walk the fairground. I have often felt that walking that fairground at the age of 10 was the best thing that could have happened to me as a minister.

There were two types of people that could hold my attention forever at the state fair. The Carni-barker and the man in the booth selling Ginsu knives. I strongly believe that watching carni-barkers, knife salesmen, working as a telemarketer, and obsessively watching televangelists have been the biggest help for me in preaching.

These televangelists made such a great production of healing. They knew who in the crowd was sick. They knew the illnesses. They would theatrically have the person throw away their crutches.

"I feel that someone out there has a bunion on their left foot. Shamballa geniminus! Put your hand on the screen. Can you feel the Holy Spirit surging

through the television from your hand to your feet? I command the demon of the bunion to leave! That bunion is falling away! Praise Jesus!”

Each of these supposed men of God also claimed to be prophetic. This was where I no longer felt entertained. For some reason after watching these preachers claim their prophecies I would be filled with anger.

I realized a pattern. Even though they condemned the world for all the worst type of sins imaginable, yet if you made some sort of magic word sentence to Jesus you would become something other than the human you are now. Even more than that you needed to plant seeds for your success and wealth. You must donate money to their ministries to receive the blessings of material things in this world. God wanted so badly to provide you with wealth if you only gave them money. God had told them this while they strung together a bunch of random scripture passages. God wants to bless you, usually with material things, if you only have enough faith to give them money. They might even jump in their Lear Jet to visit your town.

What a crock. What a disgusting line of pablum. What a bunch of false prophets. It is too bad that a new generation of shysters have risen up and are fleecing people in exchange for feeling good about yourself.

As Jeremiah, I wish prophecy worked that way. When the false prophet Hananiah comes before the priests of Israel to proclaim that everything will be fixed by God. That the yoke of Babylon will be broken and that their difficult days will be done. Yet, there was still work of repentance to be done. There is a consequence for being a false prophet.

Even though Jeremiah wants this prophecy to be true, he is told by God to correct the false prophecy (also the false prophet dies). Jeremiah is the prophet that every person who claims the prophetic roll should aspire. Agonizing, crying, complaining to God about its severity, and inevitably saying what needs to be said. We have too many people reveling in the prophetic roll that wield it like a birthright.

It is much more popular to be a prophet (or should I say false prophet) who promises return. Promises that everything will return to normal. That those things

which have exiled you will be overcome expeditiously by God. It is far less popular to be a weeping prophet, or even less civil an angry one. A prophet who reminds you of the prophets of old's condemnations, who must call out the false prophets of false prosperity.

I could stand before you today and say everything that will make you feel special and right. I could tell you that climate change is a hoax. The climate will be all right I could say that racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism is overstated. That the old ways of the church are better than a current redemption. I could proclaim that all wealth is a gift from God. That our denomination, our congregation is always on the right path. That you don't have to change substantively, that you are always right. I could lie about the truth. It certainly would have helped my career better.

Someone has to care about change, about things actually getting better. Someone has to love the racist, xenophobe, sexist, abuser, greedy exploiter, acceptable criminal to declare they must change. Help them to change and turn toward justice.

If the prophet is not burning, convicted by the words that are burned onto their lips by a love for the people they are proclaiming the prophecy toward they are false. That love remains in the belief that our broken covenants must be reconciled for us to live whole in this world. Whether that is broken covenants with our neighbors, broken covenants of stewardship toward our earth, the injustice of our political systems, or the systemic injustices in our church we must love our neighbor and ourselves enough to not let us stay the same.

Justice and mercy are intertwined in our faith in the world. Know that we can be the people that God wants us to be. We are always moving, changing, and loving each other into the world that God intended. Let us move toward that hopeful prophecy this morning.