

Pentecost 7-B
7/11/21 CTK

Mark 6:14-29; Amos 7:7-15

The bible tells us that we all have spiritual gifts. They are gifts we use for the up building of God's reign here on earth. So, Paul says in 1 Corinthians, some of us have the gift of healing, some giving assistance, some teaching, some forms of leadership. And some of us are prophets.

Sometimes we think of prophets as people who predict the future, but really, to be a prophet in the biblical sense, is to be someone who can see clearly what is happening in the here and now. And that leads to a clearer view of the future: where things are going. The prophet Nathan saw that David could not be both a king and a murderous adulterer at the same time, so David had to change. Isaiah saw the political situation in his time and place and it told him that the people of God were headed for trouble.

The prophet Amos, whom we meet today, saw great economic injustice in the Israel. He saw that the poor were being exploited, being left behind in an era of great prosperity. Maybe he could see that with such clarity because he was from the south, and people from the south are special as we all know. Amos could see what even other so-called prophets, could not or would not see, and he could see where it was leading.

The people of Israel in those days were very religious. But like today, being religious isn't always what God is looking for. Piety ran very deep with Israel in those days: they did a great job of worship, their religious festivals were top notch, their music programs, their liturgy. But taking care of the widows and orphans, they weren't so great, and that was a very high priority for God in those days, I believe it still is today - looking after the poor.

Amos told the people straight up that unless they offered justice for the poor, their religiosity meant nothing to God. In fact he told them that God rejected their prayers. He said that God had shown him that a nation where injustice was so rife, could not to sustain itself morally. This was the gift that God gave to the people through Amos because God loved God's children.

Amos was not a professional prophet, and he had no loyalty to any political leaders and in fact had not chosen to be a prophet. He was a simple farmer, as he says today. It was very important to him to point that out. There were lots of prophets in

scripture who were employed by the kings, professionals whose livelihood depended upon them saying what the king wanted to hear. Sometimes I think that some of the economists of today are like those prophets. Many of them make completely opposing prophesies. And depending upon their political leanings. Some of them have got to be false prophets. And only history will be able to tell us who was a real prophet and who wasn't. So it was with biblical prophets.

The false prophet Amaziah whom we meet today was one of those professional prophets, a court prophet. He was offended by Amos's prophecy about the death of the king and the struggles Amos saw in Israel's future. He tells Amos to go back to where he came from. And, according to tradition, that is what Amos did. Soon after that the nation of Israel did fall - crushed by the Assyrian Empire, as Amos had predicted. King Jeroboam did not die by the sword however, he died of natural causes. So Amos batted 500 on that one. Even the greatest prophets aren't exactly right all the time.

We also meet John the Baptist today. A lot of folks talk about John the Baptist as the last of the OT style prophets. John even styled himself after the prophet Elijah - eating locusts and wild honey and dressing in a camel hair shirt. John called it like he saw it. He spoke truth to power, which is the job of a prophet, about the king's illicit marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. She had to trick Herod into having John beheaded, but the king had never been much of a fan of the John anyway, because he spoke the truth.

That pales of course compared to the other truth that John saw and spoke, which was that the savior of the world was coming, and in fact was here. John brought the message from God that the world needed a savior who would be with us, in us, among us for all eternity. And through whom, all the prophecies about the salvation of the world from all the other real prophets who had gone before, would come true.

So prophets speak the truth about what they see, and have this gift of being able to lead us into the future that God wants for us. The bible tells us that that is usually a very painful process for some reason. For the prophet, and for us.

Thinking about who our modern day prophets are, we talk about Nelson Mandela, with his God-given vision of a free South Africa; Sister Joan Chittister with her vision about a more open church. I think of someone like David Attenborough as a kind of prophet. He's the nature guy who makes those beautiful nature films - Life on Earth, Blue Planet. People love him for introducing them to the beauty of

creation – jungles and oceans and deserts, all kinds of plants and animals that live in those places. In his documentaries he shares that precious gift with us.

What isn't so popular though, is that he also shows us that we don't want to hear so much. That because of human selfishness and unconcern about our planet, the earth itself is under tremendous stress. He sees and talks about species on the verge of extinction, their habitat being destroyed. Forests disappearing, oceans full of plastic. This clarity of vision in the present, has led him to predict a future that is scary. This year at the G7 summit he said "we are on the verge of destabilizing the entire planet" because of climate change. It's both painful and inspiring to watch his recent documentaries because he is showing us what he sees. That's his job, if he is a true prophet.

Only time will tell who the true prophets are. The ones who, like Amos and John, came because God sent them out of grace and love for us and for all creation, to share his their gift of prophecy with us. Our job is to use our spiritual gifts to accept it and share it with others.