

Advent Course 2020: Matriarchs, Patriarchs, Prophets: the Hope and Promise of Jesus

Week 2: Prophetic Imagination, Prophetic Hope

'The characteristic way of a prophet in Israel is that of poetry and lyric. The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing.'

Taken from Walter Brueggemann: *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press; 40th anniversary edition 2018, p 40 – quoting David Noel Freedman)

1. What claims are made here about what a prophet is?
2. Does this fit with your understanding of prophecy?
3. What in this particularly strikes you?

Prophetic Poetry, Penetrating Despair:

Brueggemann: three prophetic tasks

1. The offering of symbols 'that are adequate to contradict a situation of hopelessness in which newness is unthinkable' (p 63)
2. Hope and yearning: 'the task of prophetic imagination is to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there.' (p 65)
3. Newness that redefines: 'the prophet must speak metaphorically about hope but concretely about the real newness that comes to us and redefines our situation.' (p 67)

In the following, can you find examples of the three prophetic tasks? (offering symbols, expressing hope and yearning, expressing the idea of newness)



Isaiah 40.1-10

40 Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for
ever.

⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'

¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.



Isaiah 43.18-19, 22-24

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob;
but you have been weary of me, O Israel!
You have not brought me your sheep for burnt-offerings,
or honoured me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you with frankincense.
You have not bought me sweet cane with money,
or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins;
you have wearied me with your iniquities.

Isaiah 55.1-3

55Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
² Why do you spend your money for that
which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not
satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting
covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.



Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

61The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,

and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

⁸ For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Another prophet...where's the prophetic voice here?

The Wicked Fairy at the Manger - U A Fanthorpe

My gift for the child:
No wife, kids, home;
No money sense. Unemployable.
Friends, yes. But the wrong sort -
The workshy, women, the ill
Petty infringers of the law, persons
With notifiable diseases,
Poll tax collectors, tarts;
The bottom rung.

.....His end?
I think we'll make it
Public, prolonged, painful.

Right, said the baby. That was roughly
What we had in mind.

