

A Prophetic Community

Sixth Sunday of Easter (C)

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We continue today our series at looking at the church as a set of interlocking communities. We are describing ourselves as:

- A community of peace,
- A community at mission,
- A community of care,
- A prophetic community,
- A community of witness.
- A community of power.

The community of peace with Jesus in the midst, is also the community at mission – following our Lord’s lead. This is also a community of care, acting as Jesus hands and feet to meet the needs that are presenting. We now come to perhaps the hardest concept – that of a prophetic community.

Perhaps the best starting point is that of thinking about what it means to be prophetic. The popular concept is that prophecy has something to do with predicting the future. Prophets are seen in the same context as soothsayers and fortune-tellers etc.

Prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit identified in God’s word. It can be defined as the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to His people with authority and urgency perceived by the hearers. This gift is a communication gift.

Prophets do, to a certain extent predict the future, but their prime function is that they bring forth God’s voice into the situation and say what God thinks. The predictive aspect comes from understanding God’s word and the consequences. At times, like the parent who says you will burn yourself if you touch the stove, the word of God spoken by the prophet will predict the consequences of an action or a continued action. The great prophets continued to warn Israel that if they did not return to God, their nation would be destroyed. They also promised that because of the character of God, that the nation would be restored. That these events came true, was not because they had insight into the future, but that they had a knowledge of God.

So, the work of the prophet and the prophetic community is to tell forth the words of God. In this dimension, we are called to express to the world (and the church), God thoughts. Implied in this, is an active community opening the word of the Lord to the world, encouraging individuals to faith, and speaking out to the community when the world strays from God’s standards.

There have been times in church history when groups have sought to withdraw into an enclave. To close the world out. To see that their mission is to live out the Christian life by shutting out the world. Groups like the Amish and the Exclusive Brethren

obviously fail to live out the role of speaking forth to the world. But do we?

We must not remain silent, or act as if the things that happen outside the church are of no importance. How much of our church life is inward looking? How are we engaging the world for Christ?

But before we can speak to the world as the prophetic community, we have to do our homework. The church has given us the Bible as a guidebook. As the word of God, it contains God's truths, and should not only be the source of much that we speak to the world, but the yardstick by which we measure the messages that we receive from him as well. Our starting point to be God's prophetic community is to immerse ourselves in God's word. As Anglicans, we have an advantage because we have a lectionary (list of readings) that will take us through God's word in an orderly pattern. But this assumes regular attendance (at least weekly). But even this is not enough to fully immerse ourselves. The average teaching time is between 8 and 12 minutes. If we are serious, we ought to be doing some form of study. Many groups advocate setting aside an hour each day for a quiet time that includes worship, prayer and study. There are many resources available free. These give a daily insight into scripture. You can talk to the clergy, if you are uncertain,.

In addition to this personal study, there is value in the gathering of small groups of Christians to discuss God's word together and its application to the world. Through sharing of personal insights, the group can gain a wider view of God's truths and better understand God's call on their lives. And then there is the possibility of formal biblical and theological study.

But merely knowing the word of God will not make us a prophetic community. We need to have the anointing of God's spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we are connected to God, and equipped to proclaim his word. Study of the bible will tell us what not to say, but a dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit will show us what to say. This promised gift that we celebrate in a few weeks at Pentecost will enable us to express our faith prophetically. And we maintain this connection through an active prayer life and regular worship.

As the people of Peninsula, we have a calling to be a prophetic community. To do this requires each of us to engage seriously with God's word, to actively meet with him in prayer listening for his voice and joining with our fellow Christians in regular worship.

When Jesus said to his disciples that they should love one another, he gave us our message and our test. As the prophetic community we must not only proclaim this truth but live it. The love for each other is a consequence of Jesus love for humanity – the love that laid down a life for us?

It begs the question – What is the message that we are giving to the world – as individuals as well as corporately. How can the world respond to this love unless we proclaim it? This is part of the call to follow our Lord. Are you ready to try? Can we together strive to build this prophetic community as a platform for Christ's mission?

Christ is Risen

He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

AMEN