

Prophetic Imagination

1 The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

Walter Breuggemann

2 The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair. **Walter**

Brueggemann

3 From out of the chaos of fragmentation, the isolation of illness and disability, the lack of a future, a spirituality of hope moulds and shapes whatever will keep the flickering candle burning. It may be that the grand dream does not materialize yet; as Isaiah and his followers grew to understand, the constant reshaping of hope in new situations was the prophetic task. It may be that there is not an end to the darkness, only a way of seeing in the dark, only lighting a candle within it. But that is why we keep the feast, in ceremonial time, Sabbath time, mythic time, the time of telling the stories that give substance to our hope. **Mary C. Grey**, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope*

4 In every crowd are certain persons who seem just like the rest, yet they bear amazing messages. **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

5 Avoid the bad habit of domesticating the prophet of your choice, turning him into a cheerleader for your way of thinking and way of life. Remember that all the great prophets were courageous and outrageous folks who railed against the powers-that-be, challenged self-satisfied posit, threatened the prevailing social order, and would find you falling short in some significant ways. **Parker Palmer**

6 The ones we call the prophets were the ones jailed and driven into the desert. **Noam Chomsky**

7 Power for poor people will really mean having the ability, the togetherness, the assertiveness, and the aggressiveness to make the power structure of this nation say yes when they may be desirous to say no. **Martin Luther King**

8 We are being called like our forefathers and forefathers to be the moral defibrillators of our time. We must shock the heart of democracy with our love. We must shock the heart of our democracy with our mercy. We must shock the heart of democracy and fight for justice for all. We can't give up on the heart of our democracy. Not now. Not ever.

Rev. William Barber II, speaking to the 2020 Democratic National Convention

9 All the victories we enjoy today—voting rights, Social Security, minimum wage—100 years ago were seen as virtually impossible...Everything we won, people had to start winning in the midst of opposition that looked like it was overwhelming. I believe that's the moment we're in right now. **Rev. William Barber II**

10 Prophecy
Dana Gioia

Sometimes a child will stare out of a window
for a moment or an hour—deciphering
the future from a dusky summer sky.

Does he imagine that some wisp of cloud
reveals the signature of things to come?
Or that the world's a book we learn to translate?

And sometimes a girl stands naked by a mirror
imagining beauty in a stranger's eyes
finding a place where fear leads to desire.

For what is prophecy but the first inkling
of what we ourselves must call into being?
The call need not be large. No voice in thunder.

It's not so much what's spoken as what's heard—
and recognized, of course. The gift is listening
and hearing what is only meant for you.

Life has its mysteries, annunciations,
and some must wear a crown of thorns. I found
my Via Dolorosa in your love.

And sometimes we proceed by prophecy,
or not at all—even if only to know
what destiny requires us to renounce.

O Lord of indirection and ellipses,
ignore our prayers. Deliver us from distraction.
Slow our heartbeat to a cricket's call.

In the green torpor of the afternoon,
bless us with ennui and quietude.
And grant us only what we fear, so that

Underneath the murmur of the wasp
we hear the dry grass bending in the wind
and the spider's silken whisper from its web.

--from his 2012 collection, *Pity the Beautiful* (Graywolf Press)

For Reflection and Discussion

1 Are there prophetic pronouncements that ring in your ear? To what extent do they inform your behavior? What are you challenged to do?

2 How does All Souls do in performing the three prophetic tasks that Walter Breuggemann sets out for the church: “to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair”? Is one of these tasks especially important to you?

3 In your spheres of influence, do you play a role in truth telling, grieving, and expressing hope in “a society that lives in despair”?

---Mary Beth Hatem, for All Souls Church, Unitarian