

Prophets arise when we least expect them
A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
January 28, 2024
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Ok, so these are not the usual portrayals of two cherished Bible stories: the birth of Moses on the right, basket and bullrushes; and, the Nativity scene, Jesus born among animals. All these conveyed in glorious LEGO. I love LEGO, it was my childhood medium for my grand architectural visions.

There is a very serious question, though, asked in the Deuteronomy Story that is asked by the people of Israel. Is God going to send them a prophet? You see, they are afraid of God, in all God's wonder, so they want a prophet who will mediate God's message, hold Israel accountable, but also to mediate the holiness, even terror that comes with God's presence.

Remember the story of Moses coming down from atop Mt. Sinai, carrying the Ten Commandments? Moses didn't know that he was radiating light as he descended. He probably looked an ancient version of radioactive to the Israelite community. No one encountered the Creator, and lived, they believed. So, who would have the audacity to continue this work? Who would also have the integrity to accept the authority of speaking God's words, bridging the chasm between God atop that mountain and God's people below, and with honesty?

Martin Luther, who parted ways with his Roman Catholic tradition, with great regret and pain, I might add, felt a sense of awe, perhaps a better word was fear, literal fear, in approaching God's Word (Scripture) and Sacraments like the Eucharist – the Catholic word for what we call Communion. I can relate to that sense of awe, perhaps even fear.

I marvel at our Christian tradition. Communion, Baptism, preaching. There is something wondrous about this sacred rhythm of our lives. Each week we come together to worship. We sing, we pray, we feel the presence of the community around us. We ponder the ancient words of Scripture, the Jewish Scriptures, the Christian Scriptures, all speaking to our modern reality. What a gift we have been given!

As I remember the process of my "call" to serve here at St. Andrew's, I don't imagine we had quite the same sense of terror about the process of discerning together in those interviews, not quite the angst that the people of Israel felt, watching Moses glowing, descending from the Holy Mountain, carrying the Commandments to them.

Is there room for that wonder, that fear, that drama in our culture around us today? Is there room for that holiness in US today? I hope that the answer is "yes" to both of those questions.

I think that our world is filled with seekers today; perhaps they are not coming to worship on Sunday to find the Holy, but they are seeking. There is seeking for a leader, for a movement, for a community, in our world, and seeking integrity, honesty, candour, courage. Too often leaders have emerged, and say what people want to hear, not a Word that might be from God.

I think we yearn for that vision of radiance, that message from God that points us to where we need to be – who we need to be.

Ancient times and our modern present time are not at all different.

And so, we might hear those words that Moses conveyed from God, so, let us hear those words of Deuteronomy with modern ears:

I'll raise up a prophet for them from among their fellow Israelites – one just like you.

Prophets are so important, but the work of the community – us – to discern the charlatan from those who speak truth to power, that is the holy work.

As I held little Catherine, knowing her wonderful legacy, and faith that she inherits from her mother and father, and the community of faith around her now, I am confident that God will raise up new prophets. Perhaps she, or Roger, will be formed into a prophet who will speak of God's visions, God's challenges, God's call to our world to transformation.

God will raise up a prophet from among you, among us. But will we recognize her or him? That is why we practice this spiritual ritual, worship weekly. We hear the biblical stories again and again, so that they can be our lens through which to understand our present world, where the integrity, the truth, the visions worth struggling for are. Yes, it is true that there are hucksters out there, but let us together discern who the new prophets are – speaking a Word from God – words of comfort some times, while other times words of challenge – in our modern times. Amen.