

The Priestly Duty of Prophetic Preaching

Text: Romans 15:16 (TNIV)

16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me **the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel** of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, you give us both the power to speak and the power to listen. Grant me the grace to speak so that what I say will be of some benefit to those who hear. In Christ name. Amen!

I wish to say thanks to the Dean Rev. Tim Dobbin and acknowledge the presence of his grace, Bishop Terry Dance. I am honoured to speak at this Clericus Meeting of the Anglican Clergy.

What's a Pentecostal like me doing in a nice Anglican place like this? It speaks well of the grace of the Anglicans! I grew up in a preacher's home and eventually entered university in a rebellious state. I came to faith in Christ in the time of the Jesus People movement in the early 70s. The writings of C. S. Lewis and John R. W. Stott helped to centre me in the faith and, later in seminary, I had the privilege of being the student of such notable Anglicans as J. I. Packer, Geoffrey Bromiley, and N. T. Wright among a few others. That's it for the name dropping! But my head and heart have been shaped in the historic Protestant tradition and the Anglicans have had a good influence on me.

My wife grew up Anglican, and despite being Pentecostal now, we seem to be doing our bit for Anglican Church growth. My son is a graduate of an Anglican College. My wife has a diploma from an Anglican College. Erika our daughter is married to The Rev'd Jonathan Massimi, one of the priests here. Little Samuel, our grandson, is an Anglican and it looks like another baby Anglican will arrive in April. I have had the privilege of teaching theology as

an adjunct at Queen's College, an Anglican Seminary on the campus of Memorial University. I have even given a seminar on the Need for Creed at Huron College in London.

Some of my very good friends have become Anglican. Dr Ron Kydd (St. Peter's in Cobourg) and Dr John Stephenson (St. Timothy's in Agincourt) were my colleagues for years. We taught together in Peterborough for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. They both became priested quite a number of years ago. Rumour has it that our former students had a gambling pool set up to see how long it would take me to get to Canterbury. So, I joined a Facebook group called *Pentecostals who have not yet become Anglican!*

It is a great kindness you have shown me by this invitation. I am not a scholar in OT studies, nor am I a famous person in the church. I took a more scholastic route in following Jesus than most of my peers in our tradition, but I am not superior to them for that. We all follow the call of Jesus from where we are to wherever he leads. I am just an ordinary pastor who serves Jesus in the PAOC. To borrow a line from C. S. Lewis, I am just an ordinary Pentecostal. I am neither particularly high nor particularly low. Just an ordinary pastor of a small congregation. I face the same challenges as each of you.

Sunday by Sunday I am expected to preach the gospel to the people—to feed the flock and to shepherd them as a pastor. Half my work week is focused on the preaching. Like most pastors, I desire to speak prophetically to the many social and economic issues pressing in upon us today. Reading Scriptures as we do each day brings us face to face with the ministry of great prophetic preachers. If you take a left turn at Matthew you run into the Prophets. We get struck with the boldness of Amos, the deep pain of Hosea, the disappointed Jeremiah, the gentle voice of Haggai, and a host of others. The suicidal Jonah! Go back even further and we meet the king slayer Ehud! The depressed Elijah.

Preaching is challenging. It's the most boring and useless part of Christian worship, some say. Several reasons are usually given: the dogmatic stance of the pastor on every possible issue; the lack of any forum to question the content of the sermon; the unfamiliar theological language; and the apparent lack of preparation on the pastor's part which results in a constant repeat of two or three themes.

A few years ago I wrote a little book of meditations on the Minor Prophets. I felt they were neglected in the church. They were eclipsed by the big guys such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There are 66 chapters in the 12 Minor Prophets but only 12 passages are used in the text of the day in liturgical churches. The lectionary is thin on these prophets. Few people know much about Joel, Nahum, or Malachi. The lectionary has great value but it can restrict you. One prophetic daring would be to teach expositional Bible studies on one of the Prophets. I would not advise you to neglect the gospel, or to be rebellious, just be daring and find some way to engage these sections of Scripture. It doesn't have to be on a Sunday.

I suspect different traditions have different ways of imaging what a pastor does. We don't use the word priest in the free church tradition. The main image of pastor is the one who preaches. In liturgical churches, the image of pastor is the one who prays, who hears confession, who administers the sacraments, and affirms the forgiveness of sins. The length of time given the sermon illustrates this. The average homily is about $\frac{1}{3}$ the length of the free church sermon. This limits the amount of time available for serious study in the sermon itself. I suspect you are well aware of the challenge.

The enemy of prophetic preaching, of course, is not the limited time. The enemy is Moralism. The book or movie review, the allusion to the latest best selling author, the reference to the popular blog, the recounting of a news report and the lessons we learn. This approach can reduce the sermon to an anaemic, "I'm on top of things, and while are already nice people, let's be a bit nicer this coming week." In Moralism the focus is on what we can do to

improve our selves so that God will like us better and people will think better of us. It results in a kind of class prejudice. We are fine. It's too bad about the rest of the world.

WHAT PROPHETIC PREACHING IS NOT

Prophetic preaching is more than cultural analysis and commentary. It is more than a scholarly lecture on OT theology. It is more than a condemnation of popular culture. Often called "topical" preaching, this form of presentation is quite inspiring and informative, but it lacks the solid authority of a "thus saith the Lord." Many topical preachers endeavour to be biblical. But, the temptation is there make the sermon about the opinion and personal preferences (often disguised as convictions) of the speaker.

Prophetic preaching is not a scholarly lecture on theology. The pulpit is not the place to make and ostentatious display of learning. Learning must be servant to truth. It must be employed in the service of proclamation. It exists merely to serve. Plain preaching is the rule of thumb. Words that hide the truth rather than make it known should not be uttered from the pulpit. True preaching is not an exhibition, but an exposition.

Prophetic preaching is more than a condemnation of the prevailing attitudes in our culture. Some self-proclaimed prophets appear to delight in the negative message. Their *forte* is shearing the sheep, not feeding them. Only pastoral love legitimizes prophetic licence. A prophetic voice which speaks from a heart lacking compassion surely falls short of the biblical precedents. No pastor ought to adopt a prophetic posture in the pulpit without earning that right by loving God's people.

When the pulpit is used to proclaim personal opinions, preferences and experiences, the pulpit is no more than any other public podium. The pulpit should be reserved and revered as the sacred platform for the telling of the good news of the gospel of God's saving grace in Christ.

Prophetic preaching is not social activism. The pulpit is not the place to

inspire people to vote for a cause, but to bring them face to face with God's truth. Social activism can easily become another form of works-righteousness. Preachers should not be champions of political causes or social movements, to the neglect of gospel proclamation. One can run into a ditch on both sides of this road. Remaining silent in the face of social evils will surely bring the judgment of God upon the church. Our positions must not be nebulous, but clear. Preaching must sound a definite alarm against sin, personal and corporate.

WHAT PROPHETIC PREACHING IS

Prophetic preaching is expository preaching. It is declaring or speaking out the good news. The good news is God-centred, not human-centred. Prophetic preaching makes the love of God in Christ known. It is preaching that uses illustrations as windows into the text, not as distractions from the text. It is a message of redemption to a world which needs, not exhortation, but conversion.

Prophetic preaching is doctrinally sound. The biblical preacher will heed the admonition of Paul, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt save thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16). Some Christians are blown about by every wind because many sermons are weak in doctrinal content. Can we be truly prophetic without being doctrinally solid?

The prophets were in touch with God's feelings. Heschel, the Jewish writer, spoke about the pathos of God. He highlighted how the prophets reflected the way God felt about things. So, prophetic preaching is passionate preaching. It is a serious business. It is not for the half-hearted. The greatest encouragement to preach prophetically is the fact that the Holy Spirit graciously accompanies the preaching of the Word. The anointing of the Holy Spirit creates a fire in the bones and burning in the heart. This results in a presentation that is convincing and convicting. Nothing can substitute for that special touch. All our academic preparation is merely loaves and fishes which

are too few for so many, unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.

Prophetic preaching includes a call to holy living. Preachers must also model the Word as well as preach it. If life and speech are not in harmony, the message will be unheeded and reproached. A preacher's life must not become divorced from the preaching. Preaching becomes ineffective if the preacher is morally careless. Preachers are sheep as well as shepherds. What we preach we must practice. Our character must reflect Christ-likeness. Moral purity and personal uprightness must be the constant companions of biblical preaching.

In Acts 6:2-6 we are told the serving of the tables distracted the apostles from their basic work of preaching the Word of God. Their main duty was to be distributors of divine truth, ministers of the Word. Paul advised Timothy, "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2). This was to be Timothy's all-encompassing purpose in his ministry.

Prophetic preaching is still God's way of confronting. Preaching is a priority. It is the most effective way to convince us of our need, to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and to encourage holiness of life. If we are to be anything, those of us who have been called to preach must be biblical if we are to be prophetic. We must be people of the Book. Let us wait upon God in prayer and meditation, on bended knees, before its open pages.

PRAYER

O God, our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, grant grant your blessing upon your servants, these pastors gathered here. They must lead your people. Pour out upon them a new anointing of the Holy Spirit. Help us all the grave to feel as you feel, so that when we preach the people will hear your voice that is above our voice. Empower us to speak your Word faithfully. And, may it accomplish everything you plan to the salvation of all those who call upon your name. In the Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.