Homily: Prophecy Invites Reflection, Resistance, Hope, Not Fear

Rex McKee, November 17 2024

I confess, I was excited to swap with Rena this week for next week, CTK Sunday. Not my favorite Sunday. And to be honest I am a big fan with OT voices of prophecy and wisdom. Before we go deeper into the challenging readings for this Sunday, I thought a bit of trivia might lighten our spirits somewhat.

Gabriel the messenger, Michael the protector, and Raphael the healer. Michael and Gabriel as both present in the book of Daniel. Raphael is known as the healer, and found in the book of Tobias.

Daniel recounts the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three Jewish men exiled in Babylon who refuse to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. Their defiance leads them to be thrown into a fiery furnace,

When confronted by Nebuchadnezzar, they boldly declared their trust in God, saying:

> *If our God—the one we serve—is able to rescue us from the furnace of flaming fire and from your power, Your Majesty, then let him rescue us. But if he doesn't, know this for certain, Your Majesty: we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you've set up."*

God protects them, with a mysterious fourth character appearing alongside them in the flames. This story, set during the Babylonian exile, underscores themes of unwavering faith, divine intervention, and hope, demonstrating God's power offering encouragement to the exiled Jewish community even under oppressive regimes.

Daniel 12 shifts to a prophecy of the end times, presenting a vision of hope and resurrection amid a period of distress. Daniel receives a revelation from the archangel Michael, who promises deliverance for the people of God in times of great trouble.

This prophecy introduces us to the concept of resurrection, with the dead raised to either everlasting life or everlasting contempt—one of the earliest explicit references to resurrection in the Hebrew Bible. Daniel's prophecy serves as both a warning and an encouragement, assuring that in times of tribulation, those who remain faithful will find redemption and eternal life.

In today's readings, we encounter unsettling images of destruction and upheaval. These are commonly interpreted as predictions of the end of the world, intended to evoke fear or resignation. Jesus teaches however "Do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet." Our scriptures can provide us a spiritual manual for survival.

Prophecy invites reflection. Prophecy calls us to discern current times with wisdom and courage, to avoid being swept up in panic, and, most importantly, to focus our mission on justice and discipleship.

Prophetic warnings are less about the end of days and more about how we live in the present—deepening our relationship with God, pursuing justice, and resist being consumed by the false promises of governments, economic systems, industry, and empire.

Prophecy invites us into a deeper awareness of the present. It opens our eyes to the ways in which God is actively working in our world here and now, challenging us to plant seeds that confront all systems of power and injustice we too often take for granted.

When Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple, he issues a prophetic critique of the corrupt systems upheld by the temple—a warning that religious institutions must never become complicit or silenced about injustice or the corruption of empire. The temple, representing the heart of Jewish religious and economic life, had become entwined with the Roman Empire and economic elite, a political system of oppression that exploited the poor.

We should ask, what systems in our time would Jesus' challenge?

Jesus warns us not to be misled by the grandeur of the temple or the illusion of security in human institutions. Rather we are to keep our eyes focused on God's mission of justice and healing, staying vigilant against corrupt systems and structures, always aligning ourselves with God's reign of justice and love rather than the world's systems of power and exploitation.

Prophecy calls us to discipleship. Discipleship and mission are deeply interconnected, Discipleship involves being formed in the way of Jesus, which naturally leads to participating in God's mission (missio Dei) in the world.

As we disciples grow in faith and love for God and neighbor, we are sent to embody and proclaim the good news through our lives, actions, and words. Mission, is the outworking of discipleship, expressing our faith in action and engaging in God's redemptive work.

Following the way of Jesus, who both called disciples and sent them out, the Church exists as a community of disciples living out their faith participating in God's mission of love, justice, and reconciliation.

Paul Tillich, in The Shaking of the Foundations, teaches that crisis—when structures we rely upon for meaning and security collapse—force us to confront the fragility of what we have built. When the foundations of life are shaken, whether personal, societal, or spiritual, we are invited to move beyond reliance on finite human constructs and place our trust in God, the Ground of Being.

Tillich would suggest that the prediction of the temple's destruction is more than a building's collapse; The temple symbolizes temporary human systems—religious, political, economic—that give us a false sense of power and control. Jesus reminds us that, no matter how solid these may seem, they are not eternal. They are subject to God's judgment.

Tillich's reflections were shaped by his opposition to fascism, especially witnessing Nazism's rise in Germany. He saw fascism as an example of demonic forces arising when societies place ultimate concern in finite things—whether that is the state, economic systems, race, or authoritarian rule, rather than grounding in God.

For Tillich, fascism distorted our humanity making political and social systems into idols that led to oppression and violence, promising a false sense of security at the cost of human dignity and freedom. Tillich is strongly suggests a spiritual collapse and a call to renewal.

Kelly Brown Douglas extends Tillich's critique to address the crisis of white nationalism's supremacy in our current American society. She explores how white supremacy functions as a human weapon of fear and separation, embedded in our humanity, and our cultural, political, and religious institutions. Like fascism, white supremacy distorts and dehumanizes human relationships particularly immigrants, LGBTQ+, and nonwhite individuals.

For Douglas, white supremacy operates as a demonic force prioritizing white elite dominance at the expense of others' human dignity and freedom

The collapse of the temple is a prophetic judgment against systems that oppress and dehumanize. Just as Tillich saw fascism as a false solution to societal collapse, Douglas challenges us to see how white supremacy functions as a false foundation that must be dismantled for true justice.

For both Tillich and Douglas, the shaking of foundations calls us to repentance and releasing our addiction to our idols—whether political, racial, or economic—and to trust in God's infinite presence. It invites us to pursue justice in crisis, resisting the false promises of power, wealth, or racial superiority. Crisis, whether personal or societal, can lead to spiritual rebirth when we confess broken human systems and trust in God's enduring justice.

Daniel's prophecy the "time of anguish" suggests the psychological turmoil that accompanies authentic spiritual growth, where old ways—symbolized by those who "sleep in the dust"—fall away for new life.

Carl Jung suggested that the collective unconscious contains universal archetypes, that interpret the wars, earthquakes, and cosmic upheavals as symbols of internal crises—the moments when our psychological structural balance falls apart.

Ched Myers in Binding the Strong Man, emphasizes prophecy as more than a prediction but a critique of our religious and political establishment's complicity with Empire. Once a place

of worship, the temple had become a symbol of economic exploitation and collaboration with imperial power.

MLK likewise warned that the church dismissed as an irrelevant social club had become a thermometer measuring our decline rather than a thermostat that transformed the morals of society.

Prophecy is a call to resistance, urging us to recognize the injustice embedded in human institutions and to align with Jesus' way of love, and peace. Prophets warn us against false prophets, charlatans, promising quick fixes and a return to "the good old days."

We followers of the way of Jesus are called to a nonviolent path of justice, resistance, and endurance. The Way urges vigilance and warns us to avoid seduction by lies and false promises of power.

These interpretations—Tillich, Douglas, Jung, and Myers—help us understand Daniel and Mark's prophecies as warnings against empire's golden idols. Governments, economic systems, industry, and militarism — the human structures in which we place our trust. Jesus reminds us that they are temporary and will fall under the weight of their corruption, oppression, and lack of justice.

The destruction of the temple reminds us that God's justice will ultimately prevail. Prophecies invite our reflection and our action. We are called to resist trusting in these human-made systems.

We are called to pursue justice and engage in a Holy Mission aligned with God's reign, even as the world's foundations shake. We ground ourselves filled with hope in God's enduring presence and confront idols of white supremacy and dark forces that dehumanize. Embracing inner personal transformation in the midst of crisis, we follow Jesus and faithfully stand for justice resisting all systems of exploitation.

May we have the hope and courage to stay awake, recognize the signs of our times, recognizing how economic structures, and political powers often serve themselves rather than the common good, and with vigilance pursue justice and love amid uncertainty.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. MLK

Let us remember that God is at work, calling us to deepen our faith and trust, nurturing our mission of love, mercy and justice. Giving us grace to remain faithful, discerning, and courageous amid crisis and upheaval.

November 2024, approximately 1,000 children who were separated from their parents under the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy remain separated from their families. This policy, led to the separation of over 5,000 children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. These slides are from children's Uncaged Art left behind.

When I first encountered these artifacts nearly two years ago my heart was broken. How could I be a member of a culture that could terrorize children in this way. In time I saw the hopefulness in their paintings, their dreams, their resilience.

I am closing with a hopeful dream prophecy from Bp Steve Charleston:

Dream on, even in this world of hard realities, even when the future seems to be clouded, dream on, let your imagination continue to see what might be, what could happen, what can be changed,

dream on, for by your dreaming you are not hiding from some harsh truth, but giving yourself a glimpse of the alternative, giving those around you a star to see in the night,

dream on, because your dream is hope, it is an affirmation of possibilities, a defiance of diminished life, a vision sacred and healing.

Dream on, for from your dreams a new creation will be made."

— Sanctuary of the Spirit by Steven Charleston

Amen.