

Meditation: Centering in, aware of breath, notice places in your body of comfort and of discomfort...witness your comfort and discomfort...

A Franciscan Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort,
at easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships
so that you may live
deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression,
and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for
justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears,
to shed for those who suffer pain,
rejection, hunger, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand
to comfort them and
to turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you
with enough foolishness
to believe that you can
make a difference in the world,
so that you can do
what others claim cannot be done,
to bring justice and kindness
to all our children and the poor. Amen

Message:

Where does your comfort sit? Where does your discomfort sit? Here are these voices in scripture, ancient voices, but so alive still today!

Amos 2:6-7

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Israel and for four,

I will not revoke the punishment.

Because they sell those who have done no wrong for silver

And the needy for a pair of sandals.

They trample the heads of the poor into the dust

And push the afflicted away.

Amos 4:1, 5:11, 8:4

You oppress the poor and crush the needy.

You trample on the poor and take from them taxes of grain.

You trample on the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 Today's lectionary reading...

5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. 6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Richard Rohr: [The Role of the Prophets](#)

The prophets called Israel many times to return to the covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai... There was a deep need, then and now, for someone who would call the people to return to God and to justice. Someone who would warn them, critique them, and reveal God's heart to them. We call them prophets, and every religion needs them.

For hundreds of pivotal years—starting around 1300 BCE and continuing through the eras of Israel's kingdom, exile, and conquest—prophets like Samuel, Jonah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel performed this utterly important task. Besides being truth tellers, they were radical change agents,

messengers of divine revelation, teachers of a moral alternative, and deconstructors of every prevailing order...whose job is to hold Israel maddeningly honest, and to stop them from relying on arms, money, lies, and power to keep themselves safe and in control.

In this way, they introduced a completely novel role into ancient religion: an officially licensed critic, a devil's advocate who names and exposes their own group's shadow side! Few cultures, if any, develop such a counterintuitive role. By nature, civilization is intent on success and building and has little time for self-critique. We disparage the other team and work ceaselessly to prove loyalty to our own.

- *Politics* deals with life in community, and all the many ways humans organize themselves. It does not automatically mean “partisanship” as it so often seems today.
- Who are those voices in the wilderness that lead us in a prophetic way?! MLK Jr., Howard Thurman, Dorothy Day, John Lewis. And, now— Richard Rohr, Matthew Fox, Ogun Holder, Kelly Isola, Diana Butler Bass, Dante Stewart, Rev Jaqui Lewis, Sr. Joan Chittester, Ed Goode, John Pavlovitz, Fr. Pete in the Wilderness, Fr. Adam Bucko, Kaira Jewel Lingo, Phil Goldberg... The 27 denominations and religious groups who are suing this administration's rescinding of “sensitive locations policy” a policy that made churches, schools and hospitals “sanctuary” spaces for immigrants and refugees.

Plaintiffs in this challenge are 12 national denominational bodies and representatives, 4 regional denominational bodies, and 11 denominational and interdenominational associations, all rooted in the Jewish and Christian faiths. Plaintiffs and their members are Baptist, Brethren, Conservative Jewish, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Mennonite, Quaker, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Reconstructionist Jewish, Reform Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, United Methodist, Zion Methodist, and more. They bring this suit unified on a fundamental belief: Every human being, regardless of birthplace, is a child of God worthy of dignity, care, and love. Welcoming the stranger, or immigrant, is thus a central precept of their faith practices.

I first discovered the writer Marcus Borg in two of my Unity SEE courses. In his book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, Borg writes about his encounters with the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures and how he has come to see these books of wisdom today. His first impression was from growing up and hearing the passages read in church services mostly through the lens of “predictors of the messiah.” Then in the late 60’s as a college student, grappling with his own doubts about God’s existence, he *“was struck by their passion for social justice, their anti-establishment message, and their warnings of the consequences facing a society that did not take peace and justice seriously...”*

At that time, Borg writes the prophets' messages to his ears were:

“deeply political and only incidentally religious;... passionate about Justice in this world and about the destiny and fate of societies within history. Though I knew that most of the prophets' books included visions and “call stories” in which they reported having been commissioned by God, I gave little weight to such stories... I did not imagine that God was an **experiential reality** for the prophets. I did not think of the prophets as having experiences of the sacred. I knew about believing in God; but I did not imagine that people could *know* God.

But now I'm convinced that experiences of the sacred do happen, that the prophets had such experiences, and that such experiences were foundational for what they were, said, and did. [AND] such experiences have happened throughout the history and cultures of humankind from Antiquity *into the present*.

Experiences of the Sacred were the source of their sense of mission, their passion for justice, and their courage to challenge the established power of domination systems. (Added emphasis is mine)

How do *our* experiences of the sacred – in our own practices, in our communal gatherings– how do these feed our sense of mission? Our passion for justice? Our courage to speak to truth to power?

MLK Jr:

...one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites-- polar opposites-- so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love...

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

What is ours to do? What does Love ask of us in this moment? In EVERY moment?

- Experiences of the sacred! Together, in community!
 - Stay grounded in our spiritual practices— pray, meditate, make bookmarks! Create! Write and read poetry and scripture and words of inspiration; walk, dance, sing, cry out in the wilderness!
 - Discern where YOUR voice of God within is calling you to be love correcting everything that stands against love
 - This is NOT partisanship. This is who we say we are...

The ancient and modern day prophets are not only voices of critique to the powers of domination. They are the ringing, energizing voices of HOPE.

Jeremiah 17:7-8, 10

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. I the LORD (LOVE!) test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

Isaiah 40: 3-5

3 A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Micah 6:8

“The Holy One has told you, O people, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

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May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

And so it is! Amen.