

Saint Anne's Adult Forum
The Christian Spiritual Tradition

Notes for Week 3 (August 30th)

The Prophets & the Prophetic tradition

We're not really sure where the prophetic tradition begins. There's an inexplicable appearance of persons who claim to speak on God's behalf and who are widely believed by the people as having the authority to do so.

According to tradition, Moses is considered a prophet, and he sets the standard for all future prophets. 1 - if what they say comes true, they're a prophet BUT 2 - if what they say comes true but they tell you to follow another God, then they aren't a prophet. (Compare Deuteronomy 18: 22 and Deuteronomy 13: 1-6). So there is a strict theological criterion to being a prophet.

There's at least some scriptural evidence that suggests it became a sort of official position in the royal court of ancient Israel. In fact, in the scriptural story, it's Samuel the Judge who anoints Saul, the first of Israel's kings (1 Samuel 9) and then David (1 Samuel 16). David has a prophet in his court (Nathan) who is a major power player.

Later on, there's the story of Micaiah the prophet - Ahab calls his court prophets to find out whether it's wise to go to war. (1 Kings 22). Not going to belabor this point, but there seems to be at least some official position of prophet. BUT there also seems to be an independent strain running right alongside.

Elijah and Elisha - 9th century. No clue where Elijah comes from, but Elisha is called away from plowing, so there seems to be no credentialing. It's just a calling that is responded to.

Early prophets appear to have a fearful amount of power. Samuel and the priests of Baal, Elijah and Elisha's miracles. People actually fear them.

But as the prophetic tradition evolves, it's not the mighty deeds of the prophets that become important but rather their words. And their words are jarring. More than that, though, their words provoke crises. They aren't soothsayers or predictors of the inescapable future. It's not that cut and dry.

The prophetic tradition is rooted in the idea that God cares about justice and that God's chosen people fall well short of the standard. And they generalize; they speak in hyperbole.

Heschel's description.

Considered traitors. Unpatriotic. False. Nattering nabobs of negativism. Not listened to in their own time, but because of how events played out, their words were preserved and accorded the status of sacred scripture; included in the narrative of God's chosen people.

Reluctant speakers - typical call narrative.

They feel. And they give voice to God's anguish.

But they are NOT just conduits. They are responding to and very much aware of their own time.

Not spouting universal truths - it is very much placed in their own time and space: the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The fall of Judah and the exile.

Their words can be stinging, but ultimately they are trying to convey a message of hope.

Three major themes appear in prophetic oracles: Lawsuit (you've been served), call to repentance, oracle of promise.

Brief survey of some of the prophets according to the Lawsuit, Repent, Oracle of Promise

Amos 8:7, 9:10 — 5: 4, 5: 14 — 5: 15 and 7: 2-3

Hosea 5: 3 and 7: 7 — 14: 1-4 — 5: 15-6:3

Isaiah 1: 11-15 and 28:15 — 30: 15 - 1: 24-27

Micah - 3: 1-3 —6: 1-5 — 7:8-9

Jeremiah 4: 22—4: 1-2—31: 35-36

Book of Common Prayer

p. 211 - Advent 2

p. 269 Ash Wednesday concluding prayer borrowed from Ezekiel 18: 23

Tenebrae - Basically chanted version of the book of Lamentations

The contemporary prophetic tradition. Calls for justice and warnings of disaster.