

Denice K. Leslie
October 14, 2007
Micah 6: 6 – 8
Matthew 25: 31 – 45

“What Does God Require?”

“Perhaps you have heard the story of Albert Einstein's arrival at heaven's gate. There, he was informed that his quarters were not ready and that he would have to live with three roommates.

The first of these introduced himself by saying that he had an I.Q. of 180. Einstein was delighted and assured the fellow that they would have a wonderful time discussing the theory of relativity.

The second roommate was quick to boast that he had an I.Q. of 120. Einstein replied, "Terrific. We can discuss the quantum theory of mechanics and examine some mathematical equations."

The third roommate was sheepish when he admitted that his I.Q. was only 80.

Einstein paused, gave him a long look, and asked, "Where do you think interest rates will be going this year?"¹

We have this idea that a prophet is someone who is a fortune teller, don't we? That's not true. But they were pretty good at reading God's mind.

All it takes to read God's mind is to know God, to follow God as closely as you would follow the market if you were a stock market analyst. You know God so well, you understand how God sees the world, and gradually you see the world that way too. And so you are able to speak for God—because that is what prophesy is all about. Speaking for God.

¹ (As told by Barry Asmus, "Building an Unlimited Future," Imprimis, 21 [January 1992], 1)

“The crux of the misunderstanding is this: Prophecy is not the result of seeing into the future. Instead, prophecy is the faithful declaration of the implications of current actions on the future, with the hope of having an impact on both.

For instance, one need not be a rocket scientist to figure out that increasing economic inequities lead to social dissolution and fragmentation. So someone with the courage to say that wealth accumulation leads to the destruction of community, and that the result will be a future awash in violence, isn't looking into a crystal ball. They're simply sensitive to inevitabilities.”²

Just look at Iraq after Saddam enriched the Sunni and impoverished the Shiites. Or consider what the Europeans did to keep Germany down following World War I with the terms of the armistice---which set things up for Germany to cause World War II.

It is always worth remembering that when we don't know history, we condemn ourselves to repeat it. Prophetic Christians KNOW the saving history of God on our behalf in scripture.

Which brings us back to the role of what it means to be a prophet—a spokesperson for God.

Gerhard von Rad defined the Old Testament prophet as one who "participates in the emotions of God."

And the New International Version of the bible tells us, “A prophet is someone who uses knowledge and understanding to guard the people as we read in Jeremiah 3:15: "Then I will give you shepherds... who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." (NIV)³

God calls us as Christians to enter into God's own heart and rise up and answer the call to shepherd the people with God's understanding and knowledge. Which also means Christians are people who, like Jesus, speak for God whether it is the

² -Bob Hulteen, "Once a Millennium," Sojourners, July-August 1998, 65.

popular thing to do or not. We do it because it is the God thing to do.

Likewise, when we, who claim to know God, fail to do what we know is of God we reap the consequences.

Isn't this the message of the story of the separation of the sheep and the goats? Some of us choose to follow and others of us don't. The result? Well, Jesus is saying here, if he were to hold court and judge us as we judge others, would we be sheep or goats?

We KNOW what Jesus showed us about God. God loves everyone. That means God loves the rich and the poor, the bad and the good, the lazy and the industrious, the glutton and the starving. God in Christ healed, saved and forgave the righteous and the sinner.

God doesn't see the world the way we see it. We see it like a color coded map that defines national borders. We see it in terms of economic systems, governments, religions, and politics. In God's sight there are no lines and no colors, no divisions—the world is one. All are one. Because God made us all.

And God loves us all the same. But God does side with some over against others. God, scripture illustrates over and over again, sides with the weak, the poor. God sides with the powerless over against those who are strong and use their strength over against others, or who have what they have at the expense of others. God says that isn't fair. Not that God's about equality—God isn't. God is about everyone having enough. Enough of the things that make for health and security. And well being. Because God knows that when the least have enough, those that have more will be secure as well. This is something we have lost sight of: that the well fare of my neighbor is also my well-faire. We Christians are called to reclaim and proclaim that loudly and clearly.

In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela tells of a place he came to during his 27 years in prison:

"It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black.

I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."⁴

Now most of us are not even conscious of how our faith informs what we think. Most of us look at the world and we assume that if someone is homeless then they must be ner-do-wells; or just aren't working hard enough, or if they really and truly wanted their plight in life to be otherwise, it could be. It's almost second nature for us to make assumptions: They've just preferred to make bad or stupid choices. We want to know why but if we simply use human nature as our tape measure we most often cast others as less than our best selves, because we are ignorant of our neighbor's reality. We haven't walked a mile in their moccasins.

A church minister was serving dinner at a shelter one evening while speaking with a "guest." The guest was a full-time construction worker who couldn't save enough money for an apartment because it cost the security deposit, plus first and last month's rent, upfront. Most of his money he gave to his ex—wife for their daughter.

Their conversation took place in the one— room shelter for 45 men filled with rows of army cots, a blanket and a pillow on each. There were tables with benches, and a cheery group of

⁴ --Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 544.

church volunteers serving dinner. The construction worker asked this minister, “So, what are you doing tonight after serving?”

The minister replied, “I’m tired. I’m going home to bed?”

The construction worker hesitated, then asked quietly, “You have a bed?”⁵

Thank God for those prophetic Christian voices who take the time to provide us with the facts of the larger reality all around us from which most of us, let’s face it, are completely insulated. Listen:

“Sadly, one of the greatest growth indicators in America seems to be the burgeoning of it’s under classes--those with the severest cases of the “have-nots.” True, there are those growing richer than rich, stockpiling millions the way the rest of us stockpile cans for recycling. But there are also far more who are so desperately poor, so utterly destitute, that even the barest essentials for existence are beyond their grasp.

The only thing equitable about this division is that it seems to cross all ethnic and racial lines. In both black and white America, a small but growing percentage of the population is amassing fortunes, while a small but ever-growing number is amassing misery.

There are a few more Michael Jordans and Bill Gates. But there are many more abandoned babies with AIDS, homeless 12-year-olds, extended families of 20 crammed into one-room apartments, elderly men and women trying to choose between medication and food.

This great capitalist nation upon which God has blessed such bounty is failing to provide the minimal means for survival to an ever-growing segment of our population. Even Adam Smith would be shocked at the way the government has abnegated responsibility for meeting the most basic needs of the poor.”⁶

⁵ HomileticsOnline, Homeless.com

⁶ Is There Room for One More?” Matthew 25: 31 – 45, November 24,

“The church must powerfully define, proclaim and live out its understanding of an alternative vision of community where the relationship between Creator and the created is affirmed, and enhances life for all time.”⁷ Defining and lifting up this alternative reality of God in contrast to the reality of the growing economic disparity around us is prophetic witness. It is bringing to bear what God requires as the prophet Micah exhorts us: to seek justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

This, people is what it means to be prophetic and to prophesy God’s word: to simply do what Jesus did. To simply tell the world this is what God requires.

This afternoon Christians from many different denominations will gather together to remember the hungry. They will participate in Church World Service annual CROP Walk. The slogan is, “We walk because they walk.”

Walking in the CROP walk is not putting food directly into a hungry person’s mouth. But it is a prophetic witness because those who walk are bringing attention to the plight of 3/4s of the world’s people—3/4s of whom are women and children who must walk every where for anything: water several times a day—no water taps! Fuel for cooking and heating—no central heating and cooling. Food and medicine—no grocery stores or medical offices or near by hospitals. The CROP walkers walk to raise awareness while raising money that will benefit the hungry here at home and far, far away.

In today’s scripture lesson, the sheep say, “When did we see you hungry or in prison, or thirsty and give you to drink?”

And Jesus echoing God’s own self-identity so profoundly says, “When you did it for the least of these, members of my family, you did it for me.”

Let us not fail to proclaim and witness to this prophetic truth!

⁷ Statement in Sojourners Magazine