

**A Sermon for Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 The Baptism of our Lord Year A RCL**  
**"...you shall be called the repairer of the breach,"**

*Before the message there must be the vision, before the sermon the hymn,  
before the prose the poem." Amos Wilder*

"Shout out, do not hold back!  
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!"

Tell God's people what will help us all to come through a difficult time, *together!*

However we may experience these days -- many with fear and outrage, some with long sought satisfaction and joy, and some are still trying to figure out just what is going on -- our rich Christian tradition holds out to us powerful strategies for making our way forward through these confusing and difficult days, *together.*

WE NEED TO PROCESS OUR OUTRAGE, FEAR, JOY, AND HOPE WITH VISION, MUSIC AND POETRY IN ORDER TO GET TO THE PROSE ACTION PLAN.

[Well, you may be wondering... if the Christian tradition has such great strategies... Why haven't we used them before? and... So now, you think you are going to tell us that?]

Those are important questions...and they deserve a response.

First of all... I **do not** know how to do what I am prayerfully asking us to try to do.

And, I would like *to try* to do that by lifting up among us this marvelous reading from the Prophet Isaiah. (...with a few vital highlights from Paul and Matthew)

For, in a consideration of Isaiah and other biblical prophets,

-- who are specialists in grappling with the divine-human relationship—

we will come across many powerful *visions* of the human propensity to "mess up" our relationships with God, with each other, and with Creation...

alongside of the Holy One's various efforts to repair the *disruptions.*

Because..."Before the message there must be the *vision*,  
before the sermon the *hymn*,  
before the prose the *poem.*"

**יא** וְנָחַד יְהוָה, הַמִּיד, וְהַשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצְחוֹת נִפְשָׁךְ, וְעֲצַמֹתֶיךָ יִחַלִּיץ; וְהָיִיתָ, כְּגֹן רְוָה, וְכַמוֹצָא מַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִכָּזְבוּ מִיָּמָיו.

**11** And the LORD will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make strong thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

**יב** וּבְנֹו מְמָךְ חֲרָבוֹת עוֹלָם, מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר-וָדוֹר תִּקְוֶמָם; וְקָרָא לְךָ גֵּדֵר פְּרִיץ, מְשַׁבֵּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשֹׁבְתֵי.

**12** And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places, thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.

JPS = You shall restore foundations laid long ago  
And you shall be called "repairer of fallen walls,  
restorer of lanes for habitation... [livable streets,.. restore old ruins, rebuild  
and renovate, make the community livable again.

### What do Prophets do? How do they help us to be Salt? Light? to be repairers and restorers of the breach, and to live with the "mind of Christ"?

**Prophets...** biblical, contemporary, artistic, musical, literary and cinematographic prophets...all help us to do this: [cin'e-mat'o-graph'ic (-mä't'ə-gräf'ik) adj. cin'e-mat'o-graph'i-cal-ly adv.

... to move through these places from...

from the *vision* to the message,  
from the *hymn* to the sermon  
from the *poem* to the prose.

Part of the reason why we don't use the riches of our tradition as we might, is the loss of these steps...

in our age of data and information, **we've tried to skip the "unskippable" steps of vision, hymn, and poetry on our way to the message, sermon and prose.** And like that place just off the freeway... the one you can see, but cannot get to, we can't get to the message, and the prose for a plan from here without the vision, the music and the poem.

We must have the vision, music, and poetry... ..in order to eventually change our minds, by moving our hearts, shaking up the status quo... allowing things to change, transform.

We need the prophetic to first move our hearts and to inspire... (Aka make way for the Spirit)...to lead and guide our actions.

### **So, how do prophets do this?**

That purple page in the bulletin offers some examples:

First of all, prophets **speak** – prophecy is fundamentally meant to be **heard**,

and bodily ingested through our ears, stomachs, and hearts...  
and then once digested... allowed to direct our feet and hands.

Prophetic speech sounds in ways that break through the barriers of rationality on the way to justice, mercy and compassion. [The Gospel isn't rational; it is grace.]

Biblical prophecy is **poetry... not narrative**. It doesn't work upon the listening community in the same ways as history, genealogy, stories,

Prophecy speaks in images, feelings, dreams, visions...concentrated language that goes to the pit of our stomachs... and moves us to respond below the level of the eyebrows.

#### **Prophets...**

primary task, as many of you know, is NOT... the prediction of the future, but rather...to

**look to the past**, to the tradition, to our shared history and experience  
**in light** of the pressing problems and issues of **the present**,  
**for the sake of the FUTURE**.

Prophets provide new ideas, understandings, ways of thinking, feeling, believing..  
acting...beyond what we already see and know...  
so that we might move wisely from the present, in light of the past, and into the future,  
faithfully, with justice, mercy and compassion.

In doing so... they

“Shout out, do not hold back!  
Lift up [their] voices like a trumpet!...” And...

To tell God's people what will help us *all* to come through a difficult time,  
*together!*

Prophets Cry out to God in distress, on behalf of and with those who are in trouble  
– in loud, creative, very strong language..  
filled with images that initially don't make sense

Call out to God's People who are in serious trouble and [know their] desperate need for  
HELP! from God.]  
as messengers of the divine, as to what is going on....  
in the current divine-human relationship

Tell outrageous stories with jarring impact that offer scathing critiques of injustice,  
human contributions to human suffering, immature faith, greed...

**as well as** holding out intimate promises and offers of Holy / Sacred reconciliation,  
welcome, healing...

The image for today that we find in this Isaiah text...is **IF you...**

12: 11 The Lord will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.  
12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called **the repairer of the breach,**  
**the restorer of streets to live in.**

**We have a LOT of breaches around us nowadays. Many. Too many.**

As prophetic poetic language... this image of “us”....as God's people as “repairers of  
the breach, restorers of livable streets”

... is not crystal clear. There are no detailed instructions as to how to do this repair and  
restoration...nor, exactly which “breaches” this refers to.

This is an image that I am holding onto these days.

And, very honestly I admit... I am asking “us” to do something I **don't** know how to do!

I don't know how to talk with and listen to people with whom I disagree.  
I don't know how to establish, maintain and nurture... relationships with  
those with whom I do not agree.

I am asking “us”, with God's help,

to try to figure out... how to go about being and doing what we can to repair and restore the breaches around us,... beginning first of all, right here on this island. [And I know that some of you are already trying to do that!]

That Gospel is really rather powerful.... we may not have noticed the twist:

in it Matthew's community hears Jesus saying to them,  
and we hear, Jesus saying to us,, to day...

YOU **ARE** THE SALT OF THE EARTH...  
YOU **ARE** THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD....

Not that **if** you are good.... you will become that, someday,

but that we ARE that, now! Today.!

Yes, it important that we know and name the breach, in order to repair it.

So, let us lament what is broken, but not get stuck there. Let us be transformed

...towards mercy and compassion by that lamentation.

Let's struggle, pray and work together to figure out how to go about repairing and restoring the many breaches among and around us.

And we will do that... to the extent that we allow ourselves...as God's people to come under the heavy influence of the visions, music, and poetry...

to make it possible to see, hear, feel and think in ways that are new to us.

In other words... to the extent that we make way for the in-spiration...the Holy Spirit – to move and guide us forward, *together*.

The Lord will guide us continually,  
and satisfy our needs in parched places,  
and make our bones strong;  
and we shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Our ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
we shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
we shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in. **AMEN.**