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**Sunday 30 January 2022 to Sunday 6 February 2022**

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Sunday 30 January 2022

# Prophets and their communities

by Kathy Matuschka

**Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).**

Read Jeremiah 1:4–10

You may recall that in response to God’s call above, Jeremiah replies: ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child’ (verse 6). This week, we will reflect on the prophetic calling. We will consider some of the experiences of someone consenting to declare God’s word and will to others. Today, though, let’s zoom out from Jeremiah to the community that supported and protected him.

Jeremiah presents as an emotional loner, and there is no disputing that people called to share unpleasant news tend to find themselves in a lonely position! But Jeremiah was not alone: he was dependent on friends like Baruch, who wrote down the words that Jeremiah received from God and read them to the people (Jeremiah 36:4,10), and Ebed-Melech, the Cushite who rescued Jeremiah from the cistern (Jeremiah 38).

Many biblical scholars believe there was a prophetic community supporting and protecting prophets like Jeremiah, possibly even contributing to the text that has been passed on to us and continuing in the tradition that Jeremiah had begun after he died.

So what, you say? Whether you identify with the prophetic gifting or not, if you are a Christian, you are part of a prophetic community, called to weigh up the words you hear in the light of God’s word and the context in which we find ourselves … and sometimes even to speak!

**Ah, Lord God, there are many things about the times in which we now live that confuse me. Especially in the western world, I wonder what you are making of us, your church. Holy Spirit, please continue to build us as communities of insight, faith and hope, supporting and encouraging one another as we speak of the things we see. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Monday 31 January 2022

# The prophetic experience

by Kathy Matuschka

**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15).**

Read Deuteronomy 18:15–20

For some, their prophetic gifting is dominant and lifelong, while others may be called to speak for a season. Today’s text describes a prophet as a person from among the people who can stand closer to the power of God than the ordinary person can.

When I was a child listening to Bible stories, I pictured biblical prophets as bold and confident, always knowing what to say and do. I assumed that a prophet sat outside the message, receiving God’s word as if they were a pizza delivery person safely transporting the message from A to B without having a strong personal investment in the message itself. Relating to today’s text, I might have imagined prophets having oven mitts strong enough to grab the message straight from the fire of God’s pizza oven, let it cool a little, and then hand it out!

However, I now believe that before a prophet speaks, they experience the word of God and wrestle with what it means for their context. I now believe that prophets sometimes sit in the middle of difficulty and adversity, submit first to the transformative process that God would perform in their own life, and then speak of what they have learned.

What prevents a prophet from being overwhelmed by God’s glory or God’s voice? I wonder if part of the prophetic gifting is to have such a heart for God and his people that the prophet cannot walk away because the discomfort of walking away is greater than the discomfort they experience through obeying and speaking.

What do you think?

**Dear God, your power and glory are simply overwhelming, and yet I must speak of it. You have promised to pour your Spirit on all people, enabling us to prophecy. By your Holy Spirit, give me your grace to speak the words you have for me. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.**

Tuesday 1 February 2022

# God goes ahead of prophets

by Kathy Matuschka

**For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah (1 Kings 17:16).**

Read 1 Kings 17:8–16

I am so grateful for the way the Bible captures the highs and lows of our human experience as God’s beloved creatures. Yesterday, we considered the challenges of being a prophet. Today, we enjoy a good old-fashioned cause-and-effect story, where three people experienced the blessings that follow from following where God leads.

It is a time of drought, and Elijah the prophet has travelled to Sidon after a stream closer to home has dried up. Interestingly, he becomes the foreigner – the one in need – seeking hospitality in another’s land. But God has gone ahead of Elijah, and Yahweh has already commanded the widow Elijah is about to meet to supply him with food (verse 9).

Yes, you heard right. Elijah is about to receive the care of a widow, one toward whom he should be showing mercy! And she, too, has heard Yahweh’s voice, meaning that there are two prophets in this story.

The widow is on her last handful of flour and planning to make one last meal for herself and her son. Nevertheless, she follows Yahweh’s lead (as well as traditional Middle Eastern culture) and serves Elijah first. And her near-empty jar and jug go on to carry the three of them through the drought!

Do you have one of those stories where you felt that God had gone ahead of you? Where God provided for your needs despite the physical realities of the situation? If so, spend some time recalling how dearly loved it made you feel.

The good news is that in the highs and lows, whatever our physical circumstances, God is always delighted in each one of us and calls us his beloved children.

**Dear loving God, thank you for providing the things I need and going ahead to the places you call me each day. Today, I pray that you will open my eyes and ears to notice how you are providing for me and how I might use these gifts you give me to minister to the needs of my fellow travellers. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 2 February 2022

# These words from our ultimate prophet

by Kathy Matuschka

**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24).**

Read Matthew 7:24–29

Jesus, our ultimate prophet, has been holding the floor since the beginning of Matthew 5, and as he finishes speaking, we note that the crowd is amazed by his authority.

Jesus has been warning about false prophets and has just identified himself as the Son of God (verse 21), leaving us in no doubt that he means to challenge the authority of the teachers of the law (verses 28,29). However, in challenging the status quo, Jesus does not leave the crowd or reader in a vacuum. Jesus has just gone to great lengths to paint for us pictures of the kingdom of God so that we can begin to imagine what this new kingdom might be like.

Standing on both his own and his Heavenly Father’s authority, Jesus claims that paying attention to what he says and putting his words into practice is like building a house (our lives) on a rock foundation.

How was the past year or two for you? Have rains been coming down a bit too heavy, and have strong winds been blowing in your life? If so, I pray that you have also known Jesus’ words to be true and trustworthy: as the windows of your life rattled and maybe even a few tiles flew off, you did not fall.

Thanks be to God.

**Dear Lord Jesus, as the storms rage, help me hear your voice. Holy Spirit, inspire me as I read and meditate on Jesus’ words and put them into practice in my life. May my life also provide a safe haven for others in their storms. Amen.**

Thursday 3 February 2022

# The hometown disadvantage

by Kathy Matuschka

**And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home’ (Matthew 13:57).**

Read Matthew 13:53–58

It’s easy to imagine that Jesus, as the Son of God, came in his final form and did not continue to develop as a human during his earthly ministry. But that would not make human sense; it would seem to be denying Jesus’ humanity. Just as Jesus grew in physical stature, surely once he began to use his gifts publicly, he was further empowered and equipped as a prophet and teacher, just as any of us might be.

As we considered yesterday, Jesus has taught extensively and powerfully, and the crowds are amazed at the authority with which he speaks. Even in Jesus’ hometown, they are amazed at his teaching and news of his miraculous powers. But they couldn’t get past the fact that they knew Jesus and his family before he exercised this authority, and they were somehow offended by who he had become.

Maybe you have experienced something similar. You know that God’s Spirit is doing something new within you, but your family system (for example, your biological family or your congregation) doesn’t want to know about it. One reason may be that the change in you disrupts the status quo and then challenge others to change!

This can be as difficult to negotiate as it is character-building! So you watch and wait … or you walk away. But you keep praying for your ‘hometown’ and that one way or another, they will receive the blessings you so deeply wanted to share with them.

**Dear Jesus, you know what it is to be human. You even know what it is to be limited in your potential. Give me such trust in your resurrection power and authority over the difficult situations of my life that I can walk away and leave things with you. Amen.**

Friday 4 February 2022

# Prophets keep walking and trusting

by Kathy Matuschka

**All the people were amazed and said to each other, ‘What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!’ (Luke 4:36)**

Read Luke 4:31–37

Once again (in a different Gospel this time), we read that the crowds were amazed at the authority Jesus spoke and acted with. This was immediately after all the people in the synagogue in Nazareth were so doubtful and furious, they were about to throw him over a cliff! It seems that the life and actions prophets can be quite polarising.

Did Jesus deliberately bait his home crowd, or was he merely responding to the respective energies he was sensing firstly in Nazareth and then in Capernaum? Regardless, if you were to keep reading in the Book of Luke, you would see more and more stories where Jesus proves his authority to heal, and people seek him for words of life and healing, suggesting it was the people in Nazareth who had misjudged Jesus and not those who followed.

If you think of the enormous power and authority Jesus carried, he could have done a lot more in his hometown than walk away. Jesus, who made a fig tree whither, could have vindicated himself with ease in that situation. But he chose not to.

Jesus’ actions showed that he trusted his Father, even while his name (and possibly that of his family) was maligned. Jesus, who knew human temptations, kept walking (verse 30).

**Dear Jesus, as you lived on this earth, you showed me how to be human. By your Holy Spirit, may I grow in trust so that I can do the work you have for me each day and then leave all things with you, whether they appear to have ended well or not. Amen.**

Saturday 5 February 2022

# How do you look from a distance?

by Kathy Matuschka

**Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; but the proud, he knows them from afar (Psalm 138:6).**

Read Psalm 138

Picture this. God (as a person – we call this anthropomorphism), standing up the road, noticing someone in the distance coming towards him. God can tell by this person’s silhouette that they are haughty – proud, overconfident in their own abilities, judgemental of others.

Haughty people can be quite easily spotted by their body language … although, people who are using bravado to cover up for their insecurities can come across the same way.

Another time it can be difficult to spot haughtiness is when it’s yourself since you can’t see yourself from up the road! Sometimes, I am most likely to be haughty in my work within the church. As I start to see the fruit of my labour, I can hold too tightly onto God’s mission and claim it as my own. When I get on the treadmill of investing too much time and energy in ‘the cause’ instead of resting in God’s grace and God’s provision, haughtiness overtakes me. Then I hurt myself and others.

We all do it, and God continues to forgive our pridefulness and restore us.

It is time to let go and remember it is by God’s authority – and not our own – that God’s work is done. In trust and hope, we are invited to pray with the psalmist (verse 8) …

**Your love, Lord, endures forever – do not abandon the work of your hands. Forgive my pride and help me grow to trust you more deeply. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 6 February 2022

# Trusting Jesus when you think you know better

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets’ (Luke 5:5).**

Read Luke 5:1–11

As followers of Christ Jesus, he calls us to trust him in all of life. It’s one thing to trust him in the areas we have little competence in, such as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It’s another thing to trust him in areas of life in which we think we have a bit of a handle, such as relationships with family and friends, our professional work, our finances or even how the ministry and mission of the church are carried out.

Something challenging in this regard happens in the well-known text of the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. Jesus gets their attention, not by calling them to trust him and obey his word when it comes to prayer or driving out demons but regarding the very activity they were experts at, namely fishing. These tired and frustrated fishermen had worked all night and caught nothing and were then instructed by a carpenter’s son to try again in another spot. To their amazement, it worked! They caught so many fish the nets began to break. For Simon Peter, this was so confronting that he recognised the holiness of Jesus and felt unworthy in his presence, even asking Jesus to go away.

Jesus is, indeed, the holy one of God who is calling these disciples to follow him all the way to the cross and empty tomb. There, he will bring the forgiveness and cleansing Peter sensed he needed and show once and for all he can be trusted. By faith in Jesus, we receive God’s mercy in our need and new life with him. As his disciples, he calls us to trust him not only for eternal life but in all of life. He calls his church to trust him in his instructions no how to go about this mission of ‘catching people’ in the net of the kingdom, even when we think we may know a better way. In what area of your life may Jesus be calling you to trust him?

**Lord Jesus, I believe; ‘help thou mine unbelief’. Thank you for calling me to follow you on the path leading to life. By your Spirit, lead me to trust you in all areas of my life, even when it’s challenging. Amen.**