

On Climate Change, Where Have All Our Prophets Gone?

Where have all the prophets gone?

That question has been on my mind after someone recently brought a quote to my attention in the context of climate change:

“The prophetic counter to denial rooted in the ideology of exceptionalism is the practice of grief that acknowledges loss - an acknowledgement that summons the city to be fully, deeply and knowingly engaged in its actual life experience,” Walter Brueggemann asserted in his 2014 book, “Reality, Grief and Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks.”

“The urban elite, of course, do not weep. Their ideology requires that they ‘suck it up’ and move on. But their sense of loss lingers beneath what is acknowledged; it has, however, no compelling power to transform as long as it remains unacknowledged.”

The problem is that we have so many false prophets who say what we want to hear, especially in the area of climate change.

The false prophets declare that it is all OK and that things are not that bad. In Christian circles, they assert we have nothing to worry about because God is sovereign and those who are fearful about the implications of climate change lack faith.

Like the pre-exile Jews, many people want to hear those voices, but the true

prophets don't say that.

In so many ways now, the prophetic task has been lost by the church and given to the scientists.

But we are in a post-truth or relative-truth culture, and people are ready to believe whom they want to believe, even when they know they are being deceived.

Scientists do not have the full answers, and they are not able to consider the full impact of climate change.

Yet, they are still doing a far better job at being prophetic than much of the church.

Too many Christians still consider environmental concerns a side issue that is irrelevant to salvation and a matter for pagans and tree huggers and so forth. They believe that scientists are far from good prophets, and they never will be, as only a few combine their vocation with a faith.

The church should be the voice calling from the wilderness. However, we have been too busy aligning ourselves with the state, conducting religious services (often for the state) or worst of all making unhealthy divisions between our faith and our works, separating social justice from evangelism and not seeing the renewal and resurrection of the world as the primary task of the church but instead getting "souls" into heaven.

Prophets have most often been unpaid and outside the context of churches because often priests lose their jobs (or their heads) when they critique their paymasters. Being a minister and remaining true to my convictions have lost my church people and money.

People go to church wanting to be challenged but not too challenged, resulting in sermons that are weak on actual theology, worship songs that are either meaningless archaic drones or lullaby pop songs, and fellowship that amounts to a quick handshake before ignoring our neighbors for another week.

We need the church to renew its role as a prophetic witness in society.

The Baptist principle of separation of church and state should give us that role, but too many Baptists have lost or set aside this part of their identity.

Many are now just one of a number of churches vying for people's attention, offering feel-good services and a cup of tea in exchange for the weekly tithe.

We need to be better, bolder and hold our convictions higher. We need to be distinct in a world that wants generic.

Editor's note: A [version](#)

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