

## Prophecy<sup>1</sup>

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What does it mean to be a community of prophesy? Rebecca Parker writes: "Our times ask us to exercise our capacity for prophetic witness. By prophetic witness I mean our capacity to see what is happening, to say what is happening and to act in accordance with what we know."<sup>2</sup>

*Reading:* What To Tell The Children

Rachel Kann<sup>3</sup>

Tell them that this is the great awakening.  
Tell them that we humans have made some huge mistakes  
And that's how we now find ourselves in this tenuous place.  
Teach them that hate is the poison.  
Teach them that love is the remedy,  
That it is better to be readied for what comes next,  
Even if the revelation is painful.  
Tell them that this is the paradigm shift,  
That the old is collapsing in on itself,  
That this death rattle is simply a temper tantrum;  
The last gasp of a dying goliath.  
Remind them of how they get wild  
When they are most tired,  
And then pass out,  
That this is what it's about,  
That this is what is happening to a decrepit and ineffective empire.  
Tell them that everything is not ok,  
And knowing that is ok.  
Tell them that pretending  
That what is unacceptable is fine  
Is what got us to this sick and dysfunctional spot on the timeline.  
Apologize for any prior attempts to teach them denial.  
Tell them you were blinded by desire for comfortable numbness.  
Express that you had the best of intentions,  
That you were working within a broken system,  
Where few benefitted at the expense of many,  
That you laid low,  
Kept to the status quo,  
Obediently played your role,  
But those days are over, because  
Now you know better.

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2 Rebecca Parker, "Rising to the Challenge of Our Times," in Walter P. Herz, *Redeeming Time: Endowing Your Church with the Power of Covenant*, p. 66-67.

3 Published November 23, 2016 at <http://hevria.com/author/rachel/> & <http://hevria.com/category/poem/>

Tell them that they have no responsibility  
To follow someone blindly based solely on a title.  
Teach them to practice discernment.  
Tell them authority and respect  
Must be earned and are not inherently deserved.  
Teach them that there are good people and bad people  
From every background, ethnicity and belief system,  
That they must align themselves with kindness,  
That there is no more time for divisiveness.  
You tell  
Them that just because something is legal,  
That doesn't mean it's right.  
You tell them  
To stand up and fight.  
Remind them of all the lawful atrocities  
Committed in the sick and twisted history  
Of this violent country,  
That Rosa Parks righteously broke a law and the world took notice,  
That Harriet Tubman is our modern-day Moses,  
That women would not be allowed to vote,  
And no one would have proposed another notion  
If the blessed rebels hadn't taken a stand.  
Tell them love will win this war,  
But only if we remember  
That love is not just one unending cuddle puddle,  
But fierce as a mother bear protecting her cubs.  
Tell them that although this existence is damaged beyond repair,  
They must not despair,  
There is possibility,  
And we will willingly and willfully open ourselves  
To new ways of being because  
The old way is not working,  
Has never worked,  
And the world deserves better,  
And we're worth it.  
Tell them they are not free  
While another suffers under enslavement.  
Teach them that we are all limbs on one body  
And we cannot chop off our own arm without deep suffering.  
Teach them humility,  
But also to re-learn to trust their intuition and  
Beg their forgiveness for unintentionally misleading them previously.  
Tell them their gifts are useful.  
Tell them they are beautiful.  
Tell them they are the truth.

## Sermon

What does it mean to be a community of prophecy? As Rebecca Parker says: "Our times ask us to exercise our capacity for prophetic witness. By prophetic witness I mean our capacity to see what is happening, to say what is happening and to act in accordance with what we know."<sup>4</sup>

These are capacities that each of us has, to varying degrees. We can't always see clearly what is going on—but by sharing what we can see with others, by listening to what others see, we can form a better picture of what is going on, a truer understanding of what is happening.

The Quaker educator Parker Palmer recently described patriotism as a “lover's quarrel with our country.”<sup>5</sup> He reminds us to quarrel lovingly and passionately about truth, about “what is and isn't true.” Many of the president's enablers are saying truth itself doesn't matter anymore. If you repeat a big lie enough times, people will begin to believe it. Or as one person said, “There's no such thing ... anymore of facts.”<sup>6</sup>

Palmer wrote on January 18th:

We who hold the quaint belief that it's often possible to tell whether what comes out of a mouth is true or false need to assert the facts every chance we get. Last week, for example, the man who says that only he can save our economy claimed that there are “96 million...wanting a job [who] can't get [one].” [False](#). There are “roughly 96 million people not in the labor force, but that includes retirees, students and others who don't want jobs. Only 5.5 million of them want work.” The unemployment rate, which neared ten percent every month of 2010, was [five percent or less every month of 2016](#).

He goes on to say:

Facts are so tedious, aren't they? And they won't change the minds of true believers. But we need to preserve them for the same reason [Medieval monasteries preserved books](#): the torches have come to town. Let's try to remember that science and the Enlightenment gave us ways to test the truth-claims of potentates and prelates, laying the foundations for our little experiment in democracy. Until someone blows up the lab, we must proclaim the facts, then tuck them into a fireproof vault until we need them again.

I am thinking about the scientists who began downloading climate change research data from government websites, to preserve the research against the possibility that a new administration would take it all down.<sup>7</sup> Fighting for and preserving truths in a time of propaganda.

To be a community of prophecy we must see what is happening, say what is happening and act in accordance with what we know.

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4 Rebecca Parker, “Rising to the Challenge of Our Times,” in Walter P. Herz, *Redeeming Time: Endowing Your Church with the Power of Covenant*, p. 66-67.

5 <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-the-soul-of-a-patriot/9146>

6 Scottie Nell Hughes, <http://thedianerehmsshow.org/shows/2016-11-30/how-journalists-are-rethinking-their-role-under-a-trump-presidency>

7 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/13/scientists-are-frantically-copying-u-s-climate-data-fearing-it-might-vanish-under-trump/?utm\\_term=.7515d55b1ab7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/13/scientists-are-frantically-copying-u-s-climate-data-fearing-it-might-vanish-under-trump/?utm_term=.7515d55b1ab7)

I am also thinking about how in our time, there are so many layers to see, and sometimes what is on the surface may be important to us, but is actually being used as a smokescreen for something else that has been hidden. We've got to really search for the meaning underneath events, for the important truths hidden behind the drama.

For example, a week ago, Representative John Lewis stated that he would not attend the inauguration of Donald Trump, because he felt that the interference wielded by Russia cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election. Trump immediately attacked Lewis in a tweet, said he was all talk and no action. The media rushed to defend Lewis, bringing out interviews about how he is a true American hero in the cause of Civil Rights. It might seem that they were trying to speak real truths in the face of falsehoods.

But later I read an article in Daily Kos, an online news journal, that gave me new insight about this. The writer, Dartagnan, pointed out that Trump is an expert on creating flashy outrageous distractions via his tweets, and most of the media follow along—so no one was paying much attention to *why* the Russians may have been trying to influence the election. Dartagnan uncovers the deeper story that much of the media ignored. He writes:

“In an interview with the Wall Street Journal on [January 13], Trump confirmed that he's “open” to lifting sanctions imposed by the US against Russia... The media are lazily treating Trump’s statement as if [the most recent sanctions] are the only sanctions “at issue.” But they're not. The far more significant sanctions are the ones [the US] imposed [in 2014] for the Russian invasion of Crimea. In particular, imposition of those sanctions put up a roadblock to a \$500 Billion dollar oil deal between ExxonMobil and Russia for jointly developing oil and gas properties in the Arctic.

....The Russian “state-owned” Rosneft corporation, [is] run by Igor Sechin, ....Putin's “de facto deputy.” Sechin was specifically sanctioned by the Treasury Department in 2014 as a response to the destabilization of Ukraine and the deal was blocked by those sanctions. Putin knew going in to the 2016 election that if he could install [someone] like Trump those sanctions would very likely be lifted in a heartbeat, with billions of profits going directly to Putin and his cabal of oligarchs, all with enormous financial interests in the project. ...The deal was in fact authored by [Rex] Tillerson, which gives us a clear rationale why he is the perfect person, from Putin's point of view, to be our Secretary of State.”<sup>8</sup>

Our capacity to exercise prophetic witness is dependent upon our ability to see through the smokescreens put up by the new administration, and dig deeper for the power deals that are being conducted, and for whose benefit. It means turning to news sources whose reporters are willing to dig deep to uncover the issues beneath the surface.

Understanding the implications of the Exxon-Russia deal makes me wonder if most of Trump's more outrageous statements are merely meant to stir up his base, and inflame his opponents. Perhaps he doesn't really care what happens to women, or people of color, or GLBTQ people, or Muslims, or even immigrants—not that he can't generate a lot of damage. Damage has already been done.

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8 <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2017/1/15/1620728/-John-Lewis-Is-A-Brave-Man-A-Hero-and-This-Weekend-A-500-Billion-Dollar-Distraction>

But it also may all be a distraction to syphon off the energies of resistance, while he quietly goes about consolidating the power of the super rich and multinational corporations. It may really be about generating outlandish profits through a complete corporate takeover of the land and resources of this country. That could be fatal to the environment and the capacity for all of us to have a future on this planet.

I am not saying that we should ignore what is happening to people who are vulnerable to this new climate of hate. We must continue to speak and act in solidarity with all who are targeted. But to be a community of prophecy we must open our eyes on many levels, and reveal what is meant to be kept hidden.

Another layer of this power of communal prophecy is that those of us whose voices are often heard, who have the privilege that creates a larger platform, need to stop speaking sometimes; we need to step back and take time to listen to the voices that have been marginalized. We need to listen to those who are targeted, not merely to come to their aid, but to learn from them, and to take leadership from them. Indigenous people and other people of color have access to truths that mainstream American society may not be able to discern, or may choose not to notice.

For example, those who are new immigrants have valuable truths to share. I think about how so many new Mainers survived in the midst of oppression and persecution in their home countries. They developed personal and communal tools that might be important for all of us in the coming months. Plus, they can observe truths about American culture that those of us who have lived in it all our lives can't see.

Reza Jalali, who spoke here last week, gave me some hopeful insights when we were talking about the change in power in Washington. He said, America has so many non-governmental organizations, like schools and hospitals and churches, and other voluntary associations. These are a potentially powerful source of checks and balances against the damage that the current administration may try to do. Other countries which fell to authoritarian regimes did not have this resource for resistance.<sup>9</sup>

I had never really thought about our associations and organizations as a resource like that. I had assumed that every country had such things. But someone who has been an outsider can see more clearly what we often take for granted. Rebecca Parker says, "Prophetic witness ...is [also] the ability to name those places where we resist knowing what needs to be known." Those who have been outsiders within our own country can best name what needs to be known.

I am reminded of a song by Holly Near, called Listen to the Voices. One verse goes like this:

Listen to the voices of the First Nations  
Calling out the messages  
Of the earth and sky  
Telling us what we need to know  
In order to survive  
Listen to the voices of the First Nations

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<sup>9</sup> Personal conversation, paraphrased.

Native people have been on the front lines for many decades, even centuries, in the battle against corporate takeover of land and resources. When the people at Standing Rock tell us that water is life, and we need to protect the water, that is prophecy of the highest order. When they build a movement based on prayer and non-violence, we should be taking notes.

Indigenous activist Winona LaDuke has said,

My advice is: learn history. Take responsibility for history. Recognize that sometimes things take a long time to change. If you look at your history in this country, you find that for most rights, people had to struggle.

One of our people in the Native community said the difference between white people and Indians is that Indian people know they are oppressed but don't feel powerless. White people don't feel oppressed, but feel powerless. Deconstruct that disempowerment. Part of the mythology that they've been teaching you is that you have no power. Power is not brute force and money; power is in your spirit. Power is in your soul. It is what your ancestors, your old people gave you. Power is in the earth; it is in your relationship to the earth.<sup>10</sup>

To be a community of prophecy, to see what is happening, we must listen to the voices that are speaking the truths we cannot see ourselves. We must listen to history, we must listen to the earth, we must listen to people of color, and we must listen to the voice from within, the power in our spirits.

And then we must say what is happening, and act in accordance with what we know. I am reminded of the words of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who wrote, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."<sup>11</sup>

There are many ways to speak and act. I was inspired by the Hollywood actors and singers who refused to perform for the Inauguration—in this way using their influence and their silence, as a voice to send a loud message that they could not support the racism and misogyny of the new president. I was inspired by the woman who tendered her resignation from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, when they chose to participate—because she could not condone a presidency that went against all her values.

We have more power than we know. We can't lose sight of that. It is so easy to get swept up in horror over what the leaders are doing, that we can forget to use our own power for good. African American lesbian activist Audre Lorde said, "Use what power you have to work for what you believe in." One kind of power is to march and protest, and it was heartening to learn that 10,000 people marched in the streets of Portland yesterday—10,000!--and also more than 10,000 in Augusta. Hundreds of thousands marched in DC and many more in other cities around the world. That is a lot of marching power. Another kind of power is to knit, and I was thrilled to know that members of our congregation were knitting pussy hats for marchers. (show hat)

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10 [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/107298.Winona\\_LaDuke](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/107298.Winona_LaDuke)

11 From his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize: <http://www.eliewieselfoundation.org/nobelprizespeech.aspx>

Not everyone can march, but Michael Moore suggests that we all commit to calling our congregational representatives every day for the next 100 days. Or if that 3 minutes a day is too hard, call them on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, when congress is in session.<sup>12</sup> Not everyone can put their bodies on the line, like those who go to Standing Rock to protect the water there. But some people have been moving their money out of banks that support the Dakota Access Pipeline, or the tar sands in Alberta, and opening accounts with local credit unions instead. We have only begun to explore how to act for justice in our time.

To be a community of prophecy is to see what is happening, to say what is happening, and to act in accordance with what we know. Not that it will be easy. We are in for some hard times ahead. As the great African American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass once said, “Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will.”

This is what we are facing, dear ones. My colleague, Wayne Arnason, said “Take courage, friends. The way is often hard, the path is never clear and the stakes are very high. Take courage, for deep down there is another truth: You are not alone.”

#### CLOSING WORDS

Our closing words are from a song sung by pop artist Sia in honor of those who were attacked in the Pulse nightclub shooting last summer.<sup>13</sup>

Don't give up, I won't give up, don't give up, no, no, no.

Don't give up, we won't give up, don't give up, no, no, no.

As we extinguish the flame of this chalice,  
let each of us carry its light into every day of our lives.

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12 In a speech at a rally the night before the Inauguration.

13 Sia, “The Greatest” is a great song for rousing encouragement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKSRYLdjsPA>