

SEEKING JUSTICE: FORMED BY PROPHETS AND BY JESUS
JANUARY 25, 2018 – 2:50-4:20
The Rev. Dr. Rosemary Beales

What can the Biblical prophets teach us about justice in today's world?
(We can't talk about justice without talking about Prophets)

1 – What did the Prophets say and do?

(Godly Play stories: The Prophets; Isaiah as one example of a Prophet story)

Wisdom from Walter Brueggemann and Abraham Joshua Heschel

(see reverse)

2 – What did Jesus learn and embody from the Prophets' teachings?

(Godly Play story: Synagogue and Upper Room)

Discussion of Jesus' ministry as prophetic

What are some times Jesus spoke truth to power?

How did Jesus embody justice or the search for justice?

3 – Who are contemporary prophets among us?

(See additional handout listing some 20th and 21st century suggestions)

4 – How can WE serve as prophets — formed for justice — and lead our children and adults to do so?

Wisdom from Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

“The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us...It *criticizes* the dominant consciousness and *energizes* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which a community may move,” i.e., it articulates a vision. (p. 3)

The prophet engages in public grief to help the community break through numbness. “If we are to understand prophetic criticism, we must see that its characteristic idiom is *anguish* and not *anger*. The point...is to permit the community to engage in its own anguish, which it prefers to deny.” (p. 81)

“Empires live by numbness...Jesus penetrates the numbness by his compassion and with his compassion takes the first step by making visible the odd abnormality that had become business as usual. Thus compassion that might be seen simply as generous goodwill is in fact criticism of the system, forces and ideologies that produce the hurt. **Jesus enters into the hurt and finally comes to embody it.**” (p. 83)

Wisdom from Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Perennial Classics edition, 2001).

“The prophet’s eye is directed to the contemporary scene; the society and its conduct are the main theme of his speeches. Yet his ear is inclined to God.” (p.5)

“The prophet is human, yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears. He experiences moments that defy our understanding...Often, his words begin to burn where conscience ends.” (p. 12)

“He discloses *divine pathos*, not just a divine judgment. The pages of the prophetic writings are filled with echoes of divine love and disappointment, mercy and indignation...This divine pathos is the key to inspired prophecy. God is involved in the life of man.” (p. 29)

“This is the burden of a prophet: compassion for man and sympathy for God.” (p. 46).

“**Justice** is not an ancient custom, a human convention, a value; but a transcendent demand, freighted with divine concern. It is not only a relationship between man and man, it is an *act* involving God, a divine need. Justice is His line, righteousness his plummet (Isa. 28:17). It is not one of His ways, but in all His ways.” (p. 253).

LET'S CREATE A BIBLE STUDY: PROPHETS, JESUS AND JUSTICE

Example:

Who? Adults, small group, perhaps a particular ministry such as Outreach

What? Study of justice as pursued by prophets and Jesus; and its expression today

When? Sunday morning between services or after main service; 6 weeks, 50 minutes each

Where? Godly Play room, if your church has one; church meeting room or classroom

Why? To ignite a passion for justice; to undergird existing ministries with theological foundation

How? Present overview of prophets, their roles in the Old Testament and their relationship to Jesus. *Resources:* Godly Play lessons, Bible, commentaries, books such as Brueggemann's and Heschel's, news stories and biographies of contemporary figures.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS:

Session 1: Introduce series and participants. Ask participants to define what a prophet is, offer other definitions from your reading and study. Think together about how Jesus meets these definitions and who some of our contemporary prophets might be. Offer overview of the remaining sessions. Assign reading to prepare for subsequent sessions?

Session 2: Present the Godly Play story "The Prophets" (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2, Revised and Expanded*, Lesson 13, pp. 143-151¹). Ask wondering questions and allow plenty of time for discussion. Read passages on all 4 scrolls as time permits, particularly the 12 "minor" prophets, because the others will be the focus of future sessions.

Session 3: Present the Godly Play story "Isaiah" (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 6*, Lesson 11, pp. 94-102). Ask wondering questions and allow plenty of time for discussion. Reflect together how Isaiah influenced Jesus and how Jesus' ministry reflected Isaiah's work (Jesus quotes Isaiah in the NT more often than any book except Psalms).

Session 4: Present the Godly Play story "Jeremiah" (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 6*, Lesson 12, pp. 103-109). Ask wondering questions and allow plenty of time for discussion. Compare with Jesus. Imagine together what contemporary figure might be modern Jeremiahs.

Session 5: Present the Godly Play story "Ezekiel" (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 6*, Lesson 13, pp. 112-115). Ask wondering questions and allow plenty of time for discussion. Compare with Jesus. Imagine together what contemporary figure might be modern Ezekiels.

Session 6: Choose one or two contemporary prophets to examine more closely (perhaps having asked different participants to present short summaries). Imagine with the group where God might be calling these members and this congregation to prophesy in pursuit of justice, formed by prophets and by Jesus. Consider next steps in your community's justice ministries.

¹ All Godly Play stories are also available digitally and priced singly from Church Publishing, www.churchpublishing.org

YOUR TURN

TITLE _____

Example:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

YOUR SYLLABUS:

Session 1:

Session 2:

Session 3:

Session 4:

Session 5:

Session 6:

WHO ARE CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS?

1. First, look for people in your own congregation's history and/or prophets in your community.
2. The following is a list of people suggested in online crowd-sourcing. Descriptions are mostly from Wikipedia:

PRIMARILY IN SCHOLARSHIP:

Chung Hyun Kyung (b. 1956) is a South Korean Christian theologian. She is a lay theologian of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and is also an Associate Professor of Ecumenical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in the United States. Her teaching and research interests include feminist and eco-feminist theologies and ...

Ellen F. Davis is an American theologian and Old Testament scholar, currently at [Duke Divinity School](#). Her work focuses on how biblical interpretation can be used to address urgent contemporary issues in the church and world. She is particularly known for work on the ecological crisis, as expressed in her book on the Old Testament view of land and ecology, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*.- For several years, she has consulted with the [Anglican Church in Sudan](#) and [South Sudan](#) on theological education, community health, and sustainable agriculture.

Wil Gafney, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. She is the author of *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to Women of the Torah and of the Throne, a commentary on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* and *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel*.

Letty Mandeville Russell (d. 2007) was a feminist Reformed theologian. She has been described as a "prominent matriarch of contemporary feminist bible criticism". One of the first women ordained in the Presbyterian Church, she was a longtime member of the Yale Divinity School faculty.

Phyllis Tickle (d. 2015) was an American author and lecturer whose work focuses on spirituality and religion issues. After serving as a teacher, professor, and academic dean, Tickle entered the publishing industry, serving as the founding editor of the religion department at [Publishers Weekly](#), before then becoming a popular writer. She is well known as a leading voice in the [emergence church movement](#).

Renita Weems is a Hebrew Bible scholar. Her work in biblical studies is frequently cited in [feminist theology](#) and [womanist theology](#). Weems is a popular speaker and writer on biblical texts and issues of spirituality. She is a contributing writer on religion and race at [The Huffington Post](#). She is an ordained elder in the [African Methodist Episcopal Church](#).^[1]

PRIMARILY IN MINISTRY:

Traci Blackmon - Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries of The United Church of Christ and Senior Pastor of Christ the King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO. A featured voice with many regional, national, and international media outlets and a frequent contributor to print publications, Blackmon's communal leadership and work in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown, Jr., in Ferguson, MO, gained her both national and international recognition and audiences from the White House to the Carter Center to the Vatican.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (d.1945) was a German pastor, theologian, spy, anti-[Nazi](#) dissident, and key founding member of the [Confessing Church](#). His writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential, and his book *The Cost of Discipleship* has become a modern classic. He was hanged days before the liberation of Nazi camps.

Dorothy Day, [Obl.S.B.](#) (1897–1980) was an [American](#) journalist, [social activist](#), and [Catholic](#) convert. Day initially lived a [bohemian](#) lifestyle before gaining fame as a social activist after her [conversion](#). She later became a key figure in the [Catholic Worker Movement](#) and earned a national reputation as a [political radical](#), perhaps the most famous radical in [American Catholic Church](#) history.

Joan Chittister, a Benedictine Sister of Erie, has dedicated her life to voicing questions that test popularly accepted truths of the day. Her questions to both church and society focus on the empowerment of women, the development of contemporary spirituality, a redefinition and renewal of Benedictine life for seekers today, and justice for the oppressed and marginalized, particularly those in prison.

Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928) is a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest regarded as one of the principal founders of *liberation theology* in Latin America. He holds the John Cardinal O'Hara Professorship of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. [Liberation theology](#) emerged as a biblical analysis of poverty.

Henri Nouwen (d. 1996) was a Dutch [Catholic priest](#), professor, writer and theologian. His interests were rooted primarily in psychology, pastoral ministry, spirituality, social justice and community. After nearly two decades of teaching at academic institutions including the [University of Notre Dame](#), [Yale Divinity School](#) and [Harvard Divinity School](#), Nouwen went on to work with mentally and physically handicapped people at the [L'Arche](#) Daybreak community in [Ontario](#).

Parker J. Palmer (b. 1939) is an author, educator, and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. He is the founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal.

Helen Prejean, [C.S.J.](#) (b. 1939) is a [Roman Catholic nun](#), and a leading [American](#) advocate for the abolition of the [death penalty](#). She is known for her best-selling book, *Dead Man Walking* (1993), based on her experiences with two convicts on Death Row for whom she served as spiritual adviser before their executions. Sr. Prejean has founded the groups SURVIVE, to help families of victims of murder and related crimes.

Dorothee Steffensky-Sölle (d. 2003) was a [German liberation theologian](#) and writer who coined the term [Christofascism](#). Sölle studied theology, philosophy and literature at the [University of Cologne](#), earning a doctorate with a thesis on the connections between theology and poetry. She became active in politics, speaking out against the [Vietnam War](#), the [arms race](#) of the [Cold War](#) and injustices in the [developing world](#).

Becca Stevens is an author, speaker, priest, social entrepreneur, founder and president of [Thistle Farms](#). After experiencing the death of her father and subsequent child abuse when she was 5, Becca longed to open a sanctuary for survivors offering a loving community. In 1997, five women who had experienced trafficking, violence, and addiction were welcomed home. Her newest book, *Love Heals*, was published by Harper Collins in September of 2017

Nadia Bolz-Weber (b. 1969) is a Lutheran minister and public theologian. She serves as the founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Denver. She is also a two-time New York Times bestselling author (*Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* and *Pastrix: the Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*).

PRIMARILY IN ACTIVISM, ADVOCACY AND POLITICS:

Fannie Lou Hamer (d. 1977) was an [American voting rights activist](#), a leader in the [Civil Rights Movement](#), and [philanthropist](#) who worked primarily in Mississippi. She was instrumental in organizing [Mississippi's Freedom Summer](#) for the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC). On August 31, 1962, Hamer traveled on a rented bus with other Bevel volunteers to [Indianola, Mississippi](#), to register. In what would become a signature trait of Hamer as an activist, she began singing [African-American spirituals](#) to the group in order to bolster their resolve. Singing the spirituals also reflected Hamer's belief that the civil rights struggle was a deeply Christian one.

Dolores Huerta (b. 1930) is an American labor leader and civil rights activist who was the co-founder of the National Farmworkers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers (UFW). **Huerta** helped organize the Delano grape strike in 1965 in California and was the lead negotiator ...

Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement from 1954 through 1968. He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using the tactics of nonviolence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. He was assassinated (martyred) in 1968.

Winona LaDuke (born August 18, 1959) is an American environmentalist, economist, and writer, known for her work on tribal land claims and preservation, as well as sustainable development. In 1996 and 2000, she ran for Vice President as the nominee of the Green Party of the United States ...

Wilma Pearl Mankiller (d. 2010) was a community organizer and the first woman elected to serve as chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Kathleen Dean Moore (b. 1947) is a philosopher, writer, and environmental activist from Oregon State University. Her early creative nonfiction writing focused on the cultural and spiritual values of the natural world, especially shorelines and islands. Her more recent work is about the moral issues of climate ...

Rosemary Radford Ruether (b.1936) is an American [feminist](#) scholar and [Catholic](#) theologian. She is an advocate of women's [ordination](#), a movement among Catholic religious persons who affirm women's capacity to serve as priests, despite official sanction. Since 1985 Ruether has served as a board member for the [pro-choice](#) group "[Catholics for Choice](#)" (CFC).

Art Simon (b 1930) is [founder](#) and [president emeritus](#) of [Bread for the World](#), a citizens' lobby on hunger, which he served for almost two decades. His book, *Bread for the World*, won the national Religious Book Award, and was described by the late [Nobel Prize](#) economist, [Gunnar Myrdal](#), as a "clear and convincing" analysis of world hunger His most recent book is *The Rising of Bread for the World: An Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger*.

Jim Wallis Jr. (b. 1948) is a Christian writer and political activist. He is best known as the founder and editor of Sojourners magazine and as the founder of the Washington, D.C.-based Christian community of the same name. **Wallis** is well known for his advocacy on issues of peace and social justice.

Elizabeth Warren (b. 1949) is an American politician, academic, and author. A member of the Democratic Party, since 2013 she has served as the senior United States Senator from Massachusetts. **Warren** was formerly a professor of law and taught at the University of Texas School of Law...

Cornel West (b. 1953) is an American philosopher, political activist, social critic, author, and public intellectual. The son of a Baptist minister, West focuses on the role of race, gender, and class in American society and the means by which people act and react to their "radical conditionedness."

PRIMARY IN THE ARTS: WRITING, MUSIC, FILM AND VISUAL ARTS

Maya Angelou
Margaret Atwood
Octavia Butler
Annie Dillard
Rachel Held Evans
Anne Lamott
Ursula Le Guin
Flannery O'Connor
Mary Oliver
Margaret Adams (Peggy) Parker, visual artist/sculptor
Oprah Winfrey

YOUR IDEAS AND THOSE WHO COME UP IN DISCUSSION: