

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
Sunday, June 19, 2016
Rev. Howard K. Bell
Stories

It is truly a joy to be among you after having been away for two Sundays. I am in awe of what has happened in the life of this faith community and in my life during this time apart. In our time apart, I spent one week in total rest and one week fully engaged in new powerful education, fellowship, worship, and discernment at the National Open and Affirming Gathering, the MN Open and Affirming Gathering, and the MN Conference, UCC Annual Meeting.

I have been inspired by my time away to do a theme for each week of summer worship. It will be a "Prophetic Witness – starting today. Each worship service will include a Prophetic Witness/Story from a church member friend or even a repeat visitor – Thanks Larry for kicking this off today – and Janet and parents doing prophetic witness without knowing the summer theme on Jun 5 and Sonja Martens for last Sunday. Please talk to me or email me with your ideas and offerings. You can read some suggestions for the Witness/Story in the Friday Email Update. I will also be selecting a non-lectionary text that fits our theme, a non-scriptural reading that fits our theme; and where possible, the special music offerings will also align with the theme. We will also be a bit less formal in our liturgical style and in song selections as well as the joy of worshipping outdoors at least on three of the Wednesday evenings. Worship for the candidating service on July 13 will be here in the sanctuary. I hope that you will enjoy these changes. If you don't, know that they are only for the rest of summer!

Prophetic witness is different from simply predicting the future. Here are five ways in which I suggest we might discover and practice Prophetic Witness:

1. Discerning God's will for us and for God's world – as best that we are able.
2. Telling our story authentically whether our story carries pain or joy with it.
3. Speaking our truth about what we see in the world.
4. Becoming a voice for God - as did the prophet Isaiah.
5. And shaping the future:
 - by our living our faith,
 - by developing spiritual practices
 - by listening to others in order to learn root causes of injustice
 - by being engaged in service and ministry
 - And by becoming advocates for change.

This summer I will also be referencing – in my messages many of the prophetic speakers that I was privileged to hear last week. One of those speakers was Jim Bear Jacobs a Native American Storyteller. One of the powerful lessons I remember is this: For the Native American, story does not exist in time, but it exists in space." This concept made great sense to me even from the last text that I preached on May 29. In that story, you may remember,

Lady Wisdom claimed to have been with God at creation. Maybe her story existed in space and not in time. After preaching that sermon, I had an insight that since we profess that God resides in each of us maybe each of us also existed with God at creation. Maybe our life story does not exist in time, but in space. I hope and pray that we can continue to reflect on this concept as we pursue the sharing of our prophetic witness/stories this summer. It also applies to Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God when he said that the Kingdom of God is at hand. The coming of the Kingdom did not mean at a certain time in the future, but rather was happening at the time Jesus spoke and is happening today.

Warning: I was with radically progressing groups last week – and I loved it. Some of their words and even some of mine may be interpreted by some of you as being political. Know that they are spoken as prophetic words. Yes, they have political overtones if applied that way. But if you hear these words as purely political – please know that that is your interpretation and not mine - as were William Sloane Coffin's words as were Isaiah's words!

Another keynoter was Rev. Traci Blackmon. Rev. Blackmon currently serves as Acting Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries for The United Church of Christ in our National Office and serves as part of our Collegium. She was appointed to an advisory council for the US President in January 2016. While serving in our national setting, she also serves a predominantly African American UCC church in Ferguson, Missouri. In Ferguson, she was instrumental in establishing the Black Lives Matter movement.

In Rev. Blackmon's keynote address to the National Open and Affirming Gathering, she suggested that members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) communities must not become complacent now that we have marriage equality across all states in America. She also lifted up the importance of Open and Affirming Churches to become even more engaged in support of Transgender rights and in the rights of the LGBTQ people of color. Most states do not have laws for non-discrimination in housing and employment even though Minnesota is a state that does. There are also continuing efforts to enact legislation to limit LGBTQ rights in many states. And this gathering was completed on Thursday night prior to the shocking news of the mass killings that occurred in Orlando Florida. Rev. Blackmon's prophetic words included the statement: *"Until every marginalized and oppressed community is free from hatred, free from discrimination and free from oppression than none of us can be free."* One of my colleagues suggested that Rev. Blackmon reminded her in prophetic voice and in inspirational preaching of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I agree. I was deeply moved by her insights and her passion.

At the MN Open and Affirming Gathering, the keynoter was Andrea Jenkins. Andrea is an African American Transgender person. She is a writer, performer, educator and activist. She is also a nationally recognized poet. She is currently working as an Oral Historian for the Tretter collection at the University of Minnesota archives where she is recording an oral history of transgender persons in the US Midwest. Her keynote consisted of her reading a chapter she wrote in the book: [A Good Time for The Truth – Race in Minnesota](#)¹. The chapter

¹ A Good Time for The Truth, Race in Minnesota edited by Sun Yung Shin; Minnesota Historical Press, 345 Kellogg Blvd W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906. © 2016

is titled: “The Price We Pay – How Race and Gender Identity Converge.” In that essay, she speaks powerfully of how the history of slavery in America continues to live in her life today. She says, “This is the historical trauma that I carry with me on a daily basis. I can interact with white people because I understand that it is not the individual but rather the system of white supremacy that continues to hold us back.”² I will likely be sharing more of her story in coming weeks.

Rev. Traci Blackmon also keynoted the Minnesota Conference, United Church of Christ Annual Meeting. A video of that keynote is available on the Minnesota Conference website.³ I highly recommend all of you take the time to view it. Rev. Blackmon used the same text we are using this morning from Isaiah. In the Bible version she used the phrase we read as “repair the walls” reads “repair the breach”. And she identified the racial, economic, gender, sexual orientation, political and cultural breaches that God is calling us to repair.

May it be so. Amen.

² Ibid pg 166

³ <http://uccmn.org/events/am2016/>