

**Sermon**  
**Proper 7, Year A**  
**June 22, 2008**  
*by The Rev. Norman Bray*

Pray for me, that I may be granted the right words when I open my mouth, and may freely and boldly make known God's hidden purpose, for which I am an ambassador. Pray that I may speak of it boldly, as it is my duty to speak.

I used that opening prayer, which is adapted from Ephesians 6:19-20, because the Scriptures that we all heard today seem to me to require courage on the part of the preacher. Today's readings are full of the talk of death, destruction, war, there is no mushy message of love for neighbor and we did not hear "Peace be with you" anywhere in there. Is that the world that we live in the world of fear and death and the ravages of war? No, it is not, although that world does exist for millions of people, it is not where we live. We live in the land of three meals a day, the newspaper delivered to our doors every morning, a car to take wherever we want to go, even if we can't afford to go there. We live in a place where we are not in danger of being persecuted for our faith, where the only war we know of is on television, where hunger, and fear are not a part of our daily lives and that makes these Scriptures all the more difficult for us.

Prophets are, in general, not welcomed by anyone because prophets speak truth, that is "Truth" with a capital T, and even today, most of us would rather not be confronted with Truth because we are either benefiting from something that we should not be benefiting from or we are afraid to say anything because we just

don't want to make anyone angry. Jeremiah was a Prophet who suffered because he spoke God's Truth to a people who did not want to hear anything that did not support the current political structure and regime. Jeremiah did not want to be a prophet, he did not want to go on telling people what they did not want to hear because it cost him all of his friends, got him in trouble with the king, and put his life in danger. Jeremiah wanted to shut up. If all you have to say is "violence and destruction" then you are not likely to be invited to dinner. Jeremiah tried to stop and when he did he discovered that feeling that he described as "something like a burning fire shut up in my bones." The Word of God cannot be stifled and in this case God's Word was that Israel belonged to God, it did not belong to the king, and because the actions of king Josiah and his predecessors Israel was going to be destroyed. Jeremiah paid a price for being an obedient servant of the Lord.

We do not have to go all the way back to the Old Testament to find prophets though; they are still among us, speaking God's inconvenient truth. Some of you may have met Clarence Jordan and if you didn't you may be familiar with his "Cotton Patch Gospels." He was agriculture major at the University of Georgia and then went on to get a Master of Divinity at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and then a PhD in New Testament. What made him a prophet was his very prominent and very radical views on segregation and he shared those views as often as he could and this, I think that you can imagine, made him less than popular in Georgia. In 1942 he started Koinonia Farm at Americus Georgia, and it was an unusual place in that it was a racially integrated, cooperative community dedicated to living out the Gospels,

literally. Koinonia means “sharing or in common” and so all wealth was shared, the work was shared, and education was shared as they attempted to see Christ in the faces of their poor neighbors. Racism, poverty, discrimination of any sort, violence, all of these were the targets of the people at Koinonia Farm and they developed some powerful enemies. They had a small roadside stand where they sold peanuts and pecans to generate cash. The KKK blew it up. They rebuilt it, the KKK blew it up again, so they began to sell their products through the mail and today you can buy Koinonia pecans and peanuts online. They no longer use the original slogan though; “Help us get the nuts out of Georgia!” Jordan was a prophet who never ceased calling all humanity to the life that Jesus has called us to, that Jesus has prepared for us. He kept it up in spite of threats to his life because he could not do it any other way. Just like Jeremiah, God’s Truth was going to be shared.

Jordan is just an example; there are plenty of others, such as Fannie Lou Hamer from Ruleville Mississippi. In August, 1962 she and some others from Ruleville took a bus to the county seat at Indianola to register to vote. On the way home the police stopped their bus and told them that their bus was the wrong color and then took them to jail. When she was released from jail and returned home she was told by the owner of the plantation where she had sharecropped for 18 years that she had to leave. Ten days later, night riders fired 16 bullets into the home of the friends who took her in. She went to work for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) registering people to vote. In August of 1963 she was

arrested in Winona MS and beaten so hard that she could not bear to lie down in her jail cell. Imagine that if you can, beaten by another human being so badly that you cannot lie down. What would you do in that situation? I do not know what I would do but I can tell you what she did, she led the other prisoners in a jailhouse choir. They sang

“Paul and Silas was bound in jail, let my people go.

Had no money for to go their bail, let my people go.

Paul and Silas began to shout, let my people go,

Jail doors open and they walked out, let my people go.”

She was a prophet and the Word of God will not be stifled, God’s Truth is going to be proclaimed.

We could speak of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany during World War II or Bishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador in 1980 and there are many others who have given up there lives to proclaiming the Word of God. Jesus knew what was coming for the apostles and indeed for anyone who truly seeks to live out the Gospel.