

Along the Way

Oct. 18 Preacher, Pastor, Prophet

Ministers have many roles, but the most common ones are described as preacher, pastor, and prophet. It has nice alliteration. The role of preacher and pastor are easily understood, preaching the sacred texts and pastoral care for members but the role of prophet is more confusing. To be prophetic from a biblical definition has nothing to do with foretelling the future but everything with fearless truth-telling. Biblical prophets call God's people back when they have lost the way. Often their message is one of repentance combined with hope for the future.

Repentance is a word you don't hear much at Plymouth. It's one of those words that carries a lot of baggage. It brings up images of judgment and punishment. But the word used in the bible for repent is literally translated "to turn" or "return." It's a call to turn from wrongdoing or a return to God's ways. That's a powerful and life-giving definition.

But prophets have a challenging job. According to Richard Rohr, "[The prophet] is always on the edge of the inside. Not an outsider throwing rocks, not a comfortable insider who defends the status quo, but one who lives precariously ... It is a unique kind of seeing and living, which will largely leave the prophet with "nowhere to lay their head" (Luke 21:16-17). ... You can only truly unlock systems from within, but then you are invariably locked out. When you live on the edge of the inside, you will almost wish you were outside. [But] Then you are merely an enemy...a persona non grata and can largely be ignored or written off. But if you are both inside and outside, you are the ultimate threat, the ultimate reformer and the ultimate invitation."

Lately, I think the clergy at Plymouth are being called to be more prophetic, to be on the edge of the inside. To invite everyone back to our covenant with God, to our commitment to each other as a community and to offer a vision of hope that is radically different and wonderfully inclusive.

Paula Northwood

Acting Senior Minister