

#12 Receiving a Prophetic Word

When our parish was received into the CEC, Bishop Woodall prophesied over each member of the congregation as he laid hands on us. One couple received that evening later came to me questioning the legitimacy of the experience. The man accused me of deceit, saying, “You coached him. There is no way that he could have known the stuff he was saying unless you had told him ahead of time.” I assured him that was not the case. Nevertheless, the couple left the parish. A few years later I saw the man in the grocery store. He told me that he no longer went to church anywhere, and that his wife had left him. It was heartbreaking.

“Do not despise prophesying.” (1 Thess. 5:20) Receiving a word in faith is equally as important as faithfully delivering a prophecy. It’s all about relationship. Sometimes God speaks to us through other people, and our willingness to receive that word through another is important for our personal growth and the unity of the Body. God wants to communicate with us, but if we close off a means of communication with Him we inhibit His ability to speak into our lives. This does not mean that we need to accept every word from the lips of every person who claims to speak on behalf of the Lord. But it does mean that we should listen carefully, then test the word. Practice discernment. When Paul tells the Thessalonians to not despise prophesying, he puts it in this context: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thess. 5:19-21) And St. John warns us to “not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

In my second parish there was a woman who would regularly come to the rector and me before the Sunday service and “give us a word from the Lord.” Often, she would tell us that the Lord had given her THE word that we needed to preach that Sunday. The rector and I discussed the situation and agreed that we would listen carefully to her each time she approached us, and then we would say, “Thank you for that word. We will hold it up for discernment.” It is important for the unity of the Body to receive a word gracefully, even when we are skeptical of either the content or the one delivering the word.

In the same way, we must be willing to guard a true word prophetically given to us, being careful not to let it fall to the ground or be stolen from us. As said above, God wants to communicate with us. And as St. Paul tells the church at Corinth, “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.” (1 Cor. 14:3) We must guard against the devil trying to sow seeds of doubt, or our own flesh getting in the way of receiving a word of encouragement and comfort. The prophet Samuel was successful and beloved by God because “the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.” (1 Samuel 3:19) If we receive a word and are suddenly feeling judged by that word, or wracked with a sense of guilt, that is the devil trying to goad us into letting the word fall by the wayside. Prophecy is not for judgment or guilt. Don’t let the devil steal that word. Believe that God wants to encourage you.

The giving and receiving of a prophetic word is about relationship--our relationship with God and with one another in the Body of Christ. We are called to minister prophetically to one another in love for the edification of the Body (1 Cor. 14:26). And we are called to receive the gifts and ministry of others and encourage them in their gifts and calling (1 Thess. 5:11). Receiving a prophetic word gracefully and in faith is just as important as giving a word faithfully.