

Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Robin Meyers. 11/21/24

(Bolding is by JDE)

The morning after the majority of Americans who voted decided to elect a criminal before they would elect a woman, I wondered if this was indeed the beginning of the end of our democracy. We already knew who and what Donald Trump is, but the decision to return him to the world's most powerful job tells us something much more disturbing—namely, exactly who and what we are. **Make no mistake, this is America now.**

We are living in a post-truth, post-trust, post-rational world divided by fear and deception. How did we get here? By incremental acceptance of the unacceptable until it seems normal. Now we have awakened to a country many of us don't recognize. By failing to call disinformation what it is—lying. By caring more for power than for even a semblance of character or compassion. By deciding that women are 3/5th of a person.

You know this already, of course, and are probably sick of being reminded that we are indeed standing at the edge of the abyss. But there are no guardrails now, and nothing to stop Project 2025 from becoming a reality. Trump's nominees make it clear that the plan is already in motion. We shall be led by ideological fanatics, far-right sycophants whose only qualifications to serve is fawning loyalty. Look into their eyes and you will see the face of what Eric Hoffer called "true-believers." Policy as goose-stepping.

The question we should be asking ourselves in the progressive religious community is this: **What will we do now besides wallow in our misery?** Can we do anything to make what seems inevitable more difficult? **Are we ready for nonviolent noncompliance with what the Bible calls the "principalities and the powers"?**

The gospel we preach is not about salvation, but **liberation**. Gustavo Gutierrez is crying out to us from his grave: Who will continue my work? **For just as Moses came against Pharaoh and Jesus came against Rome, we are now called to resist our own empire—the Pax Americana.** Will we make plans now, in the name of Jesus, to surround families being deported at the risk of being arrested ourselves? Will we protect journalists whose job is more dangerous than ever? Will we help women seek the medical care they need even if we have to drive them across state lines and pay for it? Will we pretend there is no global climate change, losing four precious years to move away from fossil fuels as idiots dance atop of the grave of humanity chanting, "Drill Baby Drill!"

For decades we heard this question about fascism and totalitarianism: "Can it happen here?" The answer is yes. It has happened. **It is here.** The new question can no longer remain safely in the realm of speculation. There comes a time when even professors need to get out of the faculty lounge and start learning how Dr. King taught his followers to resist. **Thoughts and prayers are not enough.** They have become the perfume of cowards. Resistance is dirty and dangerous. But if not us, then who? If not here, then where? If not now, then when?

For this reason, I have been wondering **what my colleagues in the progressive religious traditions are preaching these days**. So, I've been listening to numerous sermons preached on the first Sunday following the election, Sunday, November 10th. Our churches were packed with people looking for a brave word, an honest word, a countercultural word. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to speak truth to power. It was the ultimate "teachable moment." But **mostly, what I heard was group therapy**. It sounded oddly like spiritual yoga. Congregations were led in breathing exercises from the pulpit. **Self-care was the first, and sometimes the last, order of business**.

One colleague argued in her sermon that there is really only one correct way to pray, and that is in the posture of the Orans, after the 3rd century image of a praying women with arms outstretched, hands open, her head gazing toward the heavens. At the end of the sermon, she had everyone assume that pose in the sanctuary, so that, in theory at least, everyone became a praying woman. That's how the sermon ended.

We are not here, she told her flock, to talk about "he whose name shall not be spoken." That's MSNBC's job. Really? Years ago, after the horrific murder of children in their classrooms at **Sandy Hook** Elementary, people crowded churches in the area on the Sunday following the massacre. They were hoping to hear something more than thoughts and prayers, even in the correct posture. When the priest of one Episcopal church **failed to even mention the shooting, a visitor asked her after the service if this was intentional**. "Yes," she said. "We don't do the news here."

November 10th was Stewardship Sunday, and the text was the story of the Widow's mite. Preachers praised her humility and her generosity in giving all she had, but failed to see the anti-imperial message behind a system in which even the poor must pay to pray. Not unlike modern televangelists, people are separated from their last dime to support the spectacle of the Prosperity Gospel from which they will never prosper. Rather, they help the preacher live in a mansion. Strangely, the poor do not riot. They are told they will go to heaven, where everyone will be rich.

As I wrote this article, word came that two billionaires, Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, will lead an effort to eliminate waste in the federal government. But one man's idea of waste is another man's idea of food, and I am willing to bet that the programs to be cut will be social programs, not corporate welfare—even though it constitutes ten times more in federal spending than all the money we "waste" on "welfare moms." Robert F. Kennedy Junior is not well, yet he will be in charge of "going wild" on fixing what is corrupt in our public health system. Vaccines and fluoride will be available, but only for the rich?

Mike Huckabee, an **evangelical pastor without any diplomatic experience**, will be the ambassador to Israel. **This will guarantee that the gruesome genocide against Palestinians will continue with American weapons but without remorse**, until "From the River to the Sea" is no longer a Palestinian threat, but Israel's reality, complete with condos in Gaza and the

annexation of the West Bank. As for turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks--how foolish and naïve. The Jewish prophetic tradition (including Jesus of course), cannot compete with Netanyahu's go-to devotionals: He quoted God's reputed command to King Saul to kill every man, woman, and child in Amalek. **Between Trump's fawning embrace of the evangelical vote ("I love the Christians") and Netanyahu's war crimes ("We will show no compassion") vengeance is the new righteousness.**

As Christian Nationalism becomes the only accepted form of American religion, what happens to the unorthodox among us? That is, the voices that have always challenged the madness of this and every age? Will heresy trials come back? Will only Trinitarians get hired? Or will "woke" churches just lose their tax-exempt status? That will teach us not to bow to the king. Remember, the early Jesus people prayed for Caesar, but not to him. To put it mildly, Rome was not amused.

Where have all the prophets gone? Will they rise among us again? Because as much as pastors are professionally obligated to hope, things are NOT going to be OK. If that's not the word you needed to hear today, my apologies. If it is the right, but painful word, I must not apologize. **Theology is not about teaching people to cope. It is about "making good trouble" and praying with your feet.**

Some preachers even wrote hymns in times of crisis, like **Harry Emerson Fosdick for the dedication of The Riverside Church** in the city of New York. The lyrics are a call to action as fresh as the morning newspaper.

"God of grace and God of glory, on your people pour your power; crown your ancient church's story; bring its bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour . . . From the evils that surround us and assail the Savior's ways, from the fears that long have bound us—free our hearts for faith and praise . . . Cure you children's warring madness; bend our pride to your control. Shame our reckless, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul . . . Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, make our broken spirits whole."

The hour is late. The time is now. When you hear the call, drop everything and get in the line marked DEMOCRACY.

~ Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers

About the Author

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