Hear the Advent call and live as a prophetic people

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Advent 2 A- Isaiah 11 1-10, Psalm 72 1-7, 16-20; Rm 15 4-13, Mt 3 1-12

Today – Advent 2 – is the Sunday of those meddlesome people, the prophets. They drove the old kings of Israel mad; perpetually interfering in matters they didn’t understand; naïvely obsessed with unaffordable luxuries like justice, mercy and truth – nothing to do with a cost-effective, smooth-running regime. So do we, in our time of productivity gains and cutting red tape, do we have any use for prophets?

A prophet is not a fortune teller, but someone who speaks God’s mind on what’s happening. Prophets say inconvenient things we know are true; like, the measure of a civilisation is the way it treats its most vulnerable. That’s a prophetic truth, justly aimed at regimes that forget or abuse defenceless people. A prophet sees the wrong, names it, and says how God wants things to be; says it without fear or favour.

In secular societies that prophetic role is entrusted to special officials like a judge, ombudsman or commissioner. We’ve sometimes heard prophetic voices speak when memorable judgements have protected poor and vulnerable people from the agendas of huge enterprises and even governments. But does the rule of law plant God’s passion for the powerless into the hearts and minds of a nation? Rarely at best. So we see protesters emerge, prophetically challenging their regimes about climate policy, housing policy, gender and racial equality, justice, mercy and integrity.

But judges, ombudsmen, commissioners and particularly

protesters are more and more being publicly attacked themselves; attacked by people and organisations who want questions of justice silenced; attacked by those whose priority is their own wealth and power, no matter the cost to others. Because of these power mongers, those whom justice and law should protect often see their lives ruined.
People of faith know right from wrong. We do because in Church, Synagogue and Mosque, we still read the prophets. Isaiah, Amos, Micah and the other prophets repeatedly tell the great truth of God's care for the poor and downtrodden; that God loves all alike. Prophets speak into real situations where the poor and needy are abused or neglected. They declare God's love for them and God's disgust at the abuse they suffer. What prophets say – the sheer poetry of their words – can plant God's passion for the powerless in the hearts and minds of a whole nation.

Prophets remind us that our humanity is incomplete when we disconnect from the God who loves all alike. Prophets can tell if God reigns in our hearts or not. It may irk us when they nail us for our hypocrisy. But hearing their challenge is cause for hope. God hasn't forgotten us.

Today, we sang a Psalm from a remarkable prophet-king. David offered it as a prayer for himself and his son, Solomon: that their reigns might embody God's will; that God's reign may be known on earth. 1Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. He names the heart of that reign to be the king's special care for the weakest members of the community. 2… judge God's people with righteousness, and God's poor with justice.4… defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

The world marvels at a leader brave enough even to pray such words. In Advent, we wait for the coming of the leader who will make this happen forever! This is our Advent hope. 6This one will be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like

showers that water the earth. 7In whose days righteousness may flourish and peace abound. This coming one fulfils the prophets' expectation; the blessing of all nations, when the whole earth will know the glory of God. 19Blessed be God's glorious name forever; may God's glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen. This is our Advent hope – God's Kingdom come on earth. We hope for this new beginning.

How does that speak to us in this comfortable, secure democracy we enjoy; in our polarised, post-truth world; a world where one side is absolutely right and all other views are ridiculed as nonsense? All the while, the poor and oppressed suffer more than ever. Their prayer, their Advent hope, whether spoken or not, is prophecy – your Kingdom come on earth. Our readings from the prophets call us to expectancy – pregnancy – that a leader will return and bring in this reign of justice and peace. We Christians believe it is Jesus who will come again. Isa 11. 4 with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

We're called to bathe in this language – to let it soak deep into us and transform us. Prophets keep God's concern for the powerless and the vulnerable before us. This is the source of the moral authority borne by those who protest against oppression and injustice, regardless of how the political and economic powers might try to denigrate them. Prophets call the Church to bring the Kingdom to people by risking a life in harmony with God's love for the helpless poor; first peoples and women oppressed in every society; people of inundated Pacific nations; homeless people suffering the consequences of a financial structure that empties their pockets into those of the rich.

On this Sunday of the prophets, let's hear the Advent call. Let's live as a prophetic people. Let's turn to God and live lives of justice, mercy and faithfulness. Let's embody God's Kingdom come, so that, as the great prophet commanded us

today, our church might bear fruit worthy of repentance. Amen