Foreword

Other than the 6-page piece on Jeremiah, the first 26 pages of this resource are taken from EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS, Grades 7-2, written by James McGinnis originally in 1985. Since this resource is out of print, but the material seems as pertinent now as it was twenty years ago, we are republishing it in this smaller format. The basic premise of the original unit was that God’s Word through the Hebrew prophets is a Word for all times. The basic thrust of that unit was to search for an understanding and application of this Word for our own time and how all of us are called to be God’s prophets for our own time and place. The material presents five ways of exercising our prophetic ministry and challenges both teachers and students to identify which of these ways seem most appropriate for them.

The events of September 11, 2001, the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, the consequences of these wars and other political decisions on both the US federal budget and our state budgets, and the impact of US environmental policies on God’s creation all cry out for a Word from above. In fact, probably unknowingly, we have prayed for this Word every time we have sung “God Bless America.” In the first verse we sing: “...Stand beside her and guide her through the night with the light from above.” As a nation and as the people of God, we desperately need to search for and be guided by this “light from above.” And as sharers in the prophetic ministry of Jesus, we need to voice the fruit of our prayerful reflection on this Word with those to whom God has sent us and with the religious and political leaders of our nation. This material provides ample opportunities to begin this process.

As examples of my own applications of God’s prophetic Word to these momentous events, I have included two sermons I was asked to preach at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Baltimore, MD. October 7, 2001 turned out to be the day the US launched its retaliatory strikes against Afghanistan. The Scriptural texts for that Sunday, especially from the prophet Habakkuk, begged to be preached and applied to this experience of terrorist attacks and retaliatory responses. Similarly, when I preached on the same October Sunday in 2002, the Scriptures, especially from the prophet Isaiah, lent themselves to a similar focus. The third example is a reflection on the prophetic Words of Jesus and Zechariah.

The prophetic word that has most challenged me since 9/11 is from Martin Luther King Jr’s April 4, 1967 speech entitled “When Silence Is Betrayal.” I include excerpts from this speech here, along with some reflection questions, as a way of inviting teachers and students to consider how each of us is called to break the silence on behalf of God’s Word. Dr. King’s words always bring me back to God’s calling of Jeremiah and God’s refusing to let Jeremiah use his youth as an excuse for refusing God’s call. The worksheets I include challenge all of us to prayerfully reflect on what God’s wants us to say and to whom we are to say it. Finally, as part of my own response to Dr. King’s challenge, I have included my experience at the White House during Holy Week 2003, silently proclaiming God’s Word as I understood its application to our government’s war on Iraq, and my reflections on the Holy Week Scriptures, especially from the prophet Isaiah.

Spring 2005
The Prophets – Teacher Pages

A. Teacher Overview

This unit provides an important part of the Biblical context for considering specific peace and justice issues, both in terms of understanding how central peace and justice are to our faith and of recognizing that each of us is called to be prophetic and how we can exercise our prophetic role in society. Because of its importance and challenging character, you might make this unit the focus of some prayerful reflection before teaching it, applying it to yourself before asking students to apply it to their lives. Of particular concern in this regard would be the sections on applying the Hebrew prophets’ message to contemporary situations, on the “Five Ways of Being a Prophet”, on "How Am I Called to Be a Prophet?", and the prophetic books themselves, at least the passages presented from Isaiah, Amos, and/or Jeremiah.

This unit could be a major part of a course or Bible study on the Hebrew Scriptures or just on the Hebrew prophets or it could be integrated into a peace and justice course. There is more here than can generally be included in such a course. In that case, be sure to include the most pertinent parts for your own course, but be sure to include some reading of the prophets themselves and the application of their message to our time (Part II) and how students are called to be and can be prophets themselves (Part IV).

The emphasis on personalizing the study of peace and justice through introducing students to real prophets, both the Hebrew prophets and contemporary prophets, helps students see the values translated concretely in the lives of others, the more real the ideals and values become and the more inspired students are. The diversity of the prophets’ backgrounds and their reluctance to see themselves as prophets should give students more courage to take up the prophetic dimension of their own lives as people of faith.

B. Process Suggestions

1. If you want to focus students immediately on the Hebrew prophets themselves, you might duplicate the passages from Osee and Jeremiah (p. 5) and discuss the questions following the passages.

2. To generalize from these specific prophetic examples, do some of the activities in Parts I and II.

3. The 3 more extensive segments on the prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (pp. 10-19) could be done as individual or group projects or you could do one or more of them as a whole class, if you have sufficient time.

4. To focus the Biblical message on our own situation today, use some of the activities in Part II with “To Us Today”, with several options. You could use the student reading "Maybe for Us, Today, in This Country" (pp. 20-21) or one of more of the “Recent Applications of the Prophetic Word” (pp. 27-34). But it might be better to use “Maybe for Us, Today…” at this point and save the more specifically focused reflections for later in this study.

4. To help students see the prophetic influences in their own lives, do Part III, using the chart (p. 22) for contrasting true and false prophets.

5. To examine how others have tried to exercise their prophetic ministry, first have students read Dr. King’s “When Silence Is Betrayal” speech (pp. 32-33) and discuss the questions that follow. If time permits, have them read and discuss one or both of the post-9/11 sermons (pp. 27-30) and/or “The Silent Witness for Peace at the White House” (pp. 34-36) or one of more of the “Prophets for Peace, for the Poor, and for the Earth.” These contemporary prophets could be the focus of student papers.

6. To encourage students to begin to exercise their own prophetic call, use the activities in sections B and C in Part IV, particularly the "Five Ways of Being a Prophet" reading and questions (pp. 23-24).
7. To help students deal with their own reluctance to be a prophet, have them read and discuss "Me, A Prophet? No Way!" (pp. 25-26).

8. To further consider possibilities for the whole school to live out its prophetic mandate, use the "Prophetic Possibilities for High Schools" guidelines and questions, pp. 28-29.

C. Some Helpful Resources

1. J. Elliot Corbett, THE PROPHETS ON MAIN STREET (John Knox Press, 1979) is a challenging reflection on the prophets, especially in terms of contemporary reality and our call to preach the Word in season and out of season.


4. Denise Priestly, BRINGING FORTH IN HOPE: BEING CREATIVE IN THE NUCLEAR ACE (Paulist Press, 1983) is a beautifully prophetic book naming the evils of the nuclear arms race in Biblical terms and articulating a vision of hope in the face of this contemporary "dragon" (Book of Revelation, ch. 12).


6. Regular prophetic reflection and witness on contemporary social issues are provided in a number of excellent journals, including

   — SOJOURNERS (P.O. Box 29272, Washington, DC 20017)

   — SALT (Claretian Publishing Co, 221 W. Madison, Chicago, IL 60606)

   — THE WITNESS (Episcopal Church Publishing Co., Box 359, Ambler, PA 19002)

   — NewsNotes, a bi-monthly newsletter on international justice and peace issues (Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns, P.O.Box 29132, Washington, DC 20017-0132; website: www.maryknoll.org)

7. THE PROPHETS: SHOWING US THE WAY TO JUSTICE AND PEACE (Hi-Time, Box 13337, Milwaukee, WI, 53213; 1990; 80pp) is an excellent high school student text, with an accompanying 64-page teachers guide. The 6-chapter text focuses on Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah and incorporates me approach, content and many of the activities in this unit in a very attractive format for students.

8. For a dramatic illustration of a contemporary prophet, see THE AUSCHWITZ OF PUGET SOUND (TeleKetics), a 35-minute video on Archbishop Hunthausen’s critique of US nuclear policy as the basis for true security and his advocacy of tax resistance. It illustrates the five dimensions of prophetic ministry, offers critical as well as supportive comments on his actions, and provides a good example for applying the criteria of "True Prophets". See p. 38 for quotations and discussion questions.
I. WHO AND WHAT IS A PROPHET?

A. "Prophet"

It comes from a Greek word "gas" meaning to speak out, to "broadcast" a message. A prophet, then, is someone who speaks out. However, what makes prophets different from others who speak out is the content of their message. The following characteristics of a prophet are spelled out in much greater detail in the exposition of Jeremiah (pp. 14-19).

A prophet:

— is a person of prayer; an intimate associate of God.

— is a spokesperson for God, sent by God with a mission from God: "Go say to my people..." "thus says the Lord."

— is concerned with the here-and-now, looks at present events and interprets them through God's eyes.

— works to change peoples' hearts, calling them to genuine worship, not empty ritual.

— calls people back to fidelity to God's will and understands the anguish and pain caused by unfaithfulness to God, disregard for the poor, the oppressed, the hungry.

— stands in solidarity with the powerless, those who have no voice.

— confronts the status quo (things as they are), challenges those in power to correct injustice, and calls people to renew right relationships with God and each other.

— sees evil for what it is, and calls it by its name. This often upsets the rich and powerful.

— is often seen as an agitator, a troublemaker; seen as crazy; outcast by those they love.

— is a person of deep compassion, consoling, encouraging, confronting.

B. Who Were the Hebrew Prophets?

The following brief sketches of four of the Hebrew prophets reveal that God chose very different types of people to proclaim His message.

AMOS — see pp. 10-11; and ISAIAH — see pp. 12-13.

OSEE (HOSEA) — began his prophecy shortly after Amos and was in many ways the opposite of Amos. Sensitive, warm, idealistic and enthusiastic as a young man, Osee struggled for years with his unfaithful spouse. Eventually the purpose of his fidelity became dear — he was to mirror God's forgiveness and faithfulness to God's people. Osee, too, lived through the luxuriousness of Israel, which he condemned, as well as through the Assyrian invasion and destruction of Israel (732-721 BC). Osee was the father of two children.

JEREMIAH — prophesied between 626 and 587 BC. He was from a rural priestly family, not highly regarded in Jerusalem. He remained a celibate his whole life and felt he was a great failure. No one listened to him; he was imprisoned and mistreated a number of times; Israel was taken into exile; he was jailed as a traitor when he counseled surrender to the Babylonians. He decided to remain behind with his people when the majority of Hebrews were led into exile, despite the offer of a privileged position. He was finally kidnapped, taken to Egypt, and eventually martyred. See more on pp. 14-19.
II. WHAT IS THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE?

A. To Israel

1. **The general emphasis on "Justice".**
Understanding "justice" in the broad Biblical sense as "fidelity to the demands of a relationship", we can speak of the prophetic message as calling Israel to justice - to a right relationship with God and a right relationship to one's neighbor. A right relationship with God means trust and fidelity to a God who made a covenant with Israel, pledging to be their God, to be with them to protect them. This response of trust and fidelity was to express primarily in a right relationship with one's neighbor, in particular with the poor (widows, orphans, and strangers or “aliens”). This identification of fidelity to God and care for the poor is best expressed in Jeremiah 22:15-16 and Isaiah 58:6-12.

"Your father ate and drank, like you, but he practiced honesty and integrity, so all went well for him. He used to examine the cases of poor and needy, then all went well. Is not that what it means to know me? - it is Yahweh who speaks."

As John Donahue, S.J., concludes in his article on "Biblical Perspectives on Justice" (in FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE), "the doing of justice is not the application of religious faith, but its substance; without it, God remains unknown. Thus, it is not inaccurate to say that justice is at the core of prophetic message. The following list of passages from a number of the prophets organize the prophetic message around a number of aspects, or sub-themes, of this notion of justice. It is not an exhaustive list, just suggestive:

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- Trust in Me, not in military fortifications or alliances, say Yahweh: Osee 7 and 8,10: 13-14,12: 7; Jeremiah 2:37; Isaiah 7:9b, 22:8-14, 26:7-19,30:1-18, 31:1-3.

- One day there will be peace, but it will be the fruit of justice: Amos 9:11-15; Isaiah 9:5-7,32:15-20, 65:16-25; Jeremiah 23:1-6.

2. **The special concern for justice in Amos (see pp. 10-11).**

3. **The special concern for peace and justice in Isaiah (see pp. 12-13).**

B. Activities (besides the discussion questions on Amos, Isaiah or Jeremiah, pp. 10-19)

1. To help students realize the identification of love of God and love of the poor, you might have them compare Jeremiah 22 and Isaiah 58 with other Biblical passages from the Hebrew Scriptures: Proverbs 14: 31 ("He who oppresses a poor person insults his Maker") and Proverbs 19: 17 ("He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord"); and from the Christian Scriptures: Matthew 25:31-46 ("whatever you do to the least... you do to Me...") and 1 John 4:10-21.

2. To help students realize the centrality of justice in the prophetic message, you might have the passages listed above read aloud, dramatically, to the class. Perhaps the readers could do some research into their particular prophets and try to re-enact the prophet's message - in their dress, in their manner of speaking, in the situations they spoke, e.g., dramatize Isaiah' speaking to King Ahaz (Isaiah 7) or to King Hezekiah (Isaiah 37-39), or Amos' speaking to the wealthy women of Samara (Amos 4:1-3). The word of God has power ("burns like fire" and is "like a hammer shattering a rock", Jeremiah 23:29).
C. The Prophetic Message To Us, Today

Believing that the Word of God through the Hebrew prophets was meant not only for Jews living 500 to 750 years before the Christian era, but is also addressed to us today, you might consider the following activities.

1. Examine specific texts for their application today

In addition to the questions on Amos and Isaiah and the more extensive presentation of Jeremiah, the following passages from Osee and Jeremiah seem to have practical application to our lives and society today. Each passage is identified by a summary phrase, followed by a question designed to help learners apply it to today's realities. This activity draws on the insights of J. EUiott Corbett's excellent book, THE PROPHETS ON MAIN STREET (see p. 2). Choose several passages for consideration rather than all of them.

**Osee (Hosea)**
2:21-25 (God's faithful love; how might this be specified today?)
5:1-7 (indictment of religious and political leaders; how might such an indictment read today?)
7:3-8:14 (against foreign alliances, idols and wealth as sources of security; how might we as a nation thus sought security and what would the prophet say to us today?)
10:13-11:1 (if you sow injustice and military dependence, you will reap their consequences; give examples of injustice and military dependence that we have sown as a nation and their consequences)
11:2-9 (God's vengeance yet greater love; how might this be written today for a U.S. audience?)
13:4-8 (punishment for ingratitude; what would the prophet name as God's gifts to us as a nation and how have we responded? what can we expect from God as a consequence?)

**Jeremiah**
2:1-28 (apostasy of Israel; have we too changed our gods? if so, how and with what consequences?)
4:18-22 (folly and disaster; what ways and doings are bringing us disaster? the prophet's anguish would be over what disasters today?)
4:9-10 (deceivers of the people; who are our deceivers today?)
5:21-31 (against the foolishness and injustice of Israel; who are the wicked setting traps for us, and growing sleek and rich, and who are the false prophets in our midst and what are they saying?)
6:13-15 (a sinful people without shame; how are Americans pursuing unjust gain? how are we shouting "peace, peace" when in fact there is no peace?)
15:5-7 (God is weary of relenting; for what reasons might God be weary with us today?)
22:13-17 (against the king's injustice/luxurious living; to whom would these words be addressed today and how would this prophetic message beworded?)
23:13-40 (false prophets; what are false prophets saying in our churches today?)
51:36-52 (Babylon will be crushed by God; "violence rules the earth and one tyrant cancels out another"- what is Yahweh's message to so many people suffering under tyrants today, particularly Christians in Latin America?)
2. Examine and rewrite specific prophets

Building on the reflections emerging from the first possibility, you might have your class go through one or more of the following steps in their examination and application of a specific prophet:

Step 1 - Take one of the prophets as a whole class. Amos is a good one, since he is short and his social message is central. Brainstorm with the class what parallels exist today in our own country and world and how the text might be rewritten to speak to us more directly and concretely. You might use the selections from Amos identified below as key passages for examination, but do not limit the class to just these passages. Duplicating the 9 chapters of Amos, leaving wide margins for ideas to be written alongside, and asking students to read and jot down ideas on the text before the group brainstorming might be helpful.

Step 2 - Break the class into smaller groups and have each group examine a specific prophet. This might mean asking the individuals in each group to read and jot ideas down first; then meet to brainstorm all the possible applications to our own society and world; then have each individual take a particular segment of the prophet to rewrite; and finally have the individuals share their individual written reflections with others in their group and discuss their similarities and/or differences. Perhaps each person could find visuals to illustrate their reflection.

Step 3 - Each group might make a presentation of their prophet to the whole class. This could be in the form of reading the written reflections, with or without some kind of visual collage illustrating their applications of the prophet to today's realities. An alternative would be some form of dramatic presentation in which the rest of the class might be people to whom the message is addressed. This step might be especially appropriate during Advent or Lent, or at Yom Kippur, Passover or Sukkot, and might also be presented to a larger assembly of learners.

3. Critique other applications of the prophetic message

Have students read "Maybe For Us, Today, in This County" (pp. 20-21) and jot down ideas before using the discussion questions with the whole group. Perhaps have them compare their own applications of the prophetic message with the author's. Note: A secondary teacher using this reflection found it necessary to help students deal with the question of why did God make or allow my brother to die, if God makes everything happen. The consequences promised in this reflection should be seen as the logical consequences of sinful human behavior and do not require a sense of God's intervention into history as a real estate agent, dispenser of gasoline, or weather manipulator.

III. PROPHETS TODAY IN MY LIFE

On student page 22, students are offered a chart describing criteria for recognizing a prophet, as the first step in identifying prophets in their life today. Discuss this chart with them, inviting additional criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophets. Before asking students to address the questions following the chart, consider one or more of the following activities that invite students to apply the criteria to ancient and contemporary prophets.

1. Have students apply these criteria to the Hebrew prophets they have been studying - pointing out ways or examples in which these prophets demonstrated the criteria of true prophets.

2. List on the board a number of contemporary prophets (or so-called prophets). Possibilities include all those presented in this resource. Have students identify persons they consider to be false prophets.

3. Ask students to take a stand on whether they see each example as "very prophetic", "somewhat prophetic", or "not at all prophetic". Ask each student why, what criteria they used in taking their stand.

4. Now focus on the questions on p. 22, inviting students to journal their answers before group discussion.
IV. HOW CAN WE BE PROPHETIC?

A. Rationale

While few people are called to a single significant prophetic role of the caliber of a person like Gandhi, every person of faith is called to participate in this prophetic mission. Peoples' everyday life, if lived in union with the Spirit of God can have a prophetic effect on those with whom they associate. Ordinarily this kind of prophetic action is called good example. This power should never be minimized. On the other hand, peoples' prophetic action can take the form of their personal efforts to bring about peace, overcome racial prejudice, correct economic injustice. Their very participation in such causes, prompted by their response to a prophetic message, becomes a prophetic message to others. For example, the many followers Martin Luther King gained before his assassination have themselves become prophetic by continuing his work.

B. Five Ways of Being a Prophet

1. On student pages 23-24, students are offered a description of five dimensions of prophetic ministry, with references to Biblical passages illustrating each dimension, as well as a series of questions asking them to apply each dimension to their own situation.

2. This section is followed by excerpts from the prophet Jeremiah, where he protested God's calling him to be a prophet because he was only a teenager. This is an important passage for your teenage students to reflect on carefully, because of their own resistance to responding to God's calling them to be a prophet. Allow ample time for a discussion.

3. Students are then asked to reflect on a passage from the prophet Ezekiel calling all of us to be "sentries for God's people... sounding the horn when we see the sword coming." The discussion questions ask them to identify how the "sword is coming" in their own situations and how they might be prophets and "sound their horn".

4. This section concludes with a contemporary translation of the prophet's reluctance to take up God's call. Students are encouraged to rewrite the dialogue, inserting their own excuses.

C. An Additional Process for Students as Prophets

1. Start with their own situation. Judy Thais in Memphis always had her students focus on areas of injustice within the school itself and worked out the following steps:

   — "Where's the beef?" Have students brainstorm areas of perceived injustice around the school; e.g. double standard on the dress code for boys and girls, lack of food during the second cafeteria period;

   — select one issue and state clearly the nature of the injustice;

   — find out the history or background on the issue and identify the present parties involved;

   — send a letter to the principal regarding the issue and request an appointment to "check the facts," with a copy to the student government;

   — have suggestions in mind to present to remedy the situation, involving student government representatives in the process;

   — select the student(s) who will speak for the group, with several others as observers;

   — follow through on an action plan and evaluate the results.
2. Have the students divide themselves into groups around a variety of social issues they would consider being "prophetic" about. These could include women's rights, prisons, care for the elderly, abortion, capital punishment, the arms race, poverty. It would be most important for them to name the issues they are most concerned about.

3. Have the students spend a week gathering data (newspaper/magazine articles, statements from their Church or Synagogue leaders, interviews, etc.) on their issue.

4. After each group has spent some time comparing data on their issue, each member of the group should compose a letter to the appropriate (local, state, and/or national) political representatives, speaking as concretely and "prophetically" as they can.

5. Each group could share their completed letters with the class for reactions, clarifications, comparisons.

6. Students should mail their letters as their own prophetic witness to their political representatives and perhaps also share this witness with others by talking about their action and inviting others to write their own letters or co-sign the student's own letter.

D. Prophetic Possibilities for Educational Institutions

As a further application of the call to be prophets, you might use the following possibilities for high schools and colleges as a way for your whole educational institution to reflect on its prophetic calling. These suggestions are based on the six key ways in which the World Synod of Catholic Bishops in 1971 (in JUSTICE IN THE WORLD) said church institutions were to educate for justice. Most of the suggestions are applicable to local churches and can thus serve as a way of assessing fidelity to the social mission of the church.

**PROPHETIC POSSIBILITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOLS**

1. Education for justice counteracts "a mentality which exalts possessions" and a "narrow individualism".
   — Are school resources used in a "stewardship" fashion, i.e., shared with the wider community, especially with groups involved in social change or community service?
   — In social activities (dances, etc.), in fund-raising events, in alumni/alumnae trips and other activities, does the school tend to manifest and encourage simplicity or unnecessary and wasteful consumption?
   — What kinds of efforts are made to encourage sharing of materials and recycling? Particularly at smaller schools, much greater development and use of libraries not only cuts down on book consumption, but it also encourages cooperation and mutual responsibility and care.
   — Does the school actively support and encourage members of its community and groups in the wider community promoting such efforts.
   — Is there a strong emphasis on using one's education and talents for service to the wider community? Is this reflected in the curriculum, extra-curricular programs, programs within Campus Ministry, etc.?

2. Education for justice will "awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values."
   — What is the general atmosphere at the school — conformity and authoritarian or is critical thinking actively encouraged? Are spokespersons from a wide variety of perspectives encouraged to participate in the educational process?
— How "multi-cultural" is the faculty, student body, curriculum? Does the school expose students and faculty to a wide variety of cultural perspectives?

— Does the school do the bare minimum with EEOC and other guidelines designed to multi-culturalize the educational experience or is it going far beyond the minimum in encouraging perspectives of color on campus? Are students of color supported in their efforts by ample numbers of counselors of color? Is adequate financial assistance available to help students of color overcome past economic discrimination?

— Does the school use "justice" criteria as well as cost effectiveness criteria in deciding upon suppliers? For example, does the school consider a company's affirmative action policies before doing business with it?

— Are faculty members rewarded or punished for critical thinking, especially when such thinking is not the prevailing opinion in the area/country?

— Does the school have a military science (ROTC) program? Does the school allow or encourage military recruiters on campus? Does the school have a peace studies program? Does it encourage speakers with a critical perspective on V.S. policy to come to campus?

3. Education for justice "comes through action".

— To what extent are faculty and students encouraged to participate in social change and community service (through action-oriented research in courses; what kinds of student activities get recognition and funding?

— Are programs involved in such efforts regarded as "extras" and expendable should the school experience financial constraints?

4. Education for justice will help people overcome being manipulated and will "enable them to take in hand their destinies and bring about communities which are truly human".

— How "mutual" are decision-making processes in the school? Are those affected by decisions actively involved in the making of the decisions (students, faculty, staff, wider community, etc.)? How could the school work on all levels to make the school's decision-making processes more participatory?

5. Education for justice involves the demand "that we should courageously denounce injustice..."

— Is it part of the school structure and/or job description of any member of the school administration and/or committees to actively consider the impact of school decisions on this prescription of the Church?

— Is the school taking a clear stand in its admissions policy in opposition to racial segregation or is the school allowing itself to be a "haven" for white students fleeing school desegregation?

— Are students encouraged to challenge sexist practices, both in school (e.g. in the sports program) and in the wider community, including their own church?

— In what ways is the school a voice of the voiceless victims of injustice that JUSTICE IN THE WORLD calls all church institutions and individuals to be? Is such a concern reflected in the curriculum, in the extracurricular programs the school offers, in its recruitment of faculty, in its reward mechanisms, in the stances it takes on community issues, in its support of groups outside the immediate school community?

6. Education for justice takes place also through worship.

— Are such themes/directives/actions incorporated into the worship life of the school community?

— Are they reflected in the retreats and other religious activities offered by the school?
The Hebrew Prophets

The prophets in the Hebrew scriptures were people chosen by God to speak for God to the people of God, calling them back to fidelity to their "covenant" with God when they had gone astray and reminding them of God's promise when they were discouraged. They were the bearers of the vision God wanted the people of God to have. They were constantly reminding the people to "do justice" and not lose hope in God's promise of a Kingdom or realm or community of "peace".

Amos, the Prophet of Economic Justice

A. Who was Amos?

Amos was a shepherd and a dresser of fig trees, a "farm worker" in today's terms. He lived in Tekoa, a small town 12 miles south of Jerusalem, part of the southern kingdom of Judah. One day, somewhere in the wilderness south of Jerusalem, God came to him while he was "following the flock" and made him a prophet. Around 750 B.C.E, Amos left Tekoa, crossed the border into the northern kingdom of Israel, by-passed the city of Bethel, and arrived in the busy, prosperous capital city, Samaria, where he delivered his prophetic words. He was poor, tough, crude at times, had no formal education, and was regarded as an "outside agitator" by Israel's leaders. His message was a ringing indictment of the luxuriousness and injustice of Israel.

B. What was the context for his message?

Earlier in Israel's history, the people lived agricultural lives linked together in a coalition of families. There was no centralized government, military, and merchant class in cities. But this changed with kings like David and Solomon, and by the 8th Century B.C.E. there was a merchant class that exploited the poor, controlled their lands, producing export crops like wine and oil while the poor went hungry. The legal system supported this exploitation, taking bribes and not dispensing justice "at the gate". And the wealthy lived luxuriously.

C. What did Amos say?

1. The core of Amos' message was against this economic injustice in 8th Century Israel. It was relentless, offering no words of consolation or hope, not even explicitly inviting the hearers to repentance and conversion. Because of its pervasive injustice, Samaria would be destroyed, which it was by Assyria in 722 B.C.E. Let's listen to his words:

— "Because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted..." (2:6b-8)
— "Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheavespresses down .... and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives..." (2:13-16)
— "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'An adversary shall surround the land the bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered.'" (3:9-12)
— "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are in the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'..." (4:1-3)
— "Because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine, you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate." (5:11-12)
— "Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock... who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest of oils...
— "... the great house shall be smitten into fragments..." (6:11-12)
— "Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?'" (8:4-7)
2. In the 7th Century, a scribe from Jerusalem took these passages of Amos and applied them to the needs and situation of the time, one of which was to try to unify both the southern kingdom with the restored peoples of the northern kingdom. If Jerusalem was to become the center of worship for both, then the popularity of the shrine at Bethel (only 10 miles from Jerusalem) in the northern kingdom had to be challenged, as well as false worship or empty ritual anywhere. He was also concerned that people were not paying any attention to the prophets. And, in contrast with the 8th Century Amos, he appealed to his people to repent and convert, lest Jerusalem and the whole kingdom be destroyed as had been the northern kingdom in the century before.

— "I hate, I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:21-24).

— "And I raised up some of your sons for prophets... But you made the Nazarites drink wine and commanded the prophets saying, "you shall not prophesy"" (2:11-12)

— "Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel" (5:5)! "Seek good and not evil, that you may live" (5:14). "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate" (5:15).

3. But between 598 and 582 B.C.E., Jerusalem was destroyed and her chief families sent into captivity. Another prophet took the messages of the two earlier ones and applied them to 6th Century former citizens of Judah, to help them see what caused their suffering and to call them to conversion. But during a period of exile, there was a strong need for a word of hope, which was added as the conclusion of the whole book.

— "... I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them... They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them,' says the Lord your God." (9:7-15).

D. What is God saying to us through Amos? What is Amos’ message for our own time?

— What are the economic injustices of our own time, the sinfulness in our own economic system as it operates in our own country and in the Third World? Are we personally engaged in any of them or benefit from any of them?

— Who are the "cows of Bashan" of our own time and what is being said to them? Are any of these indictments addressed to us as well? For what?

— Is our own legal system being called to change? Do we need to change any of our personal actions in dealing more fairly with others?

— Is our country suffering any of the consequences Amos predicted for his because of exploiting others? What can we expect for the future? Is it too late to repent and be saved?

— What nations would Amos single out today for condemnation and for what specific crimes/sins?

— What is true worship of God? Is any of the worship in our country "false"? Do we personally worship the way God wants? Is there anything we can or should do differently, as a nation? as individuals?

— How are prophets in our own time and country treated?

— To whom in our country and world is God speaking a word of hope through Amos? How would Amos say it today? What is God saying to us personally in that concluding passage? Are we called to be both agents and beneficiaries of those promises? If so, how?
Isaiah, The Prophet of Peace

A. Who was Isaiah?

The "first Isaiah" (chapters 1-39) was married and the father of two children. He prophesied between 740 and 700 B.C.E. and was the political advisor or counselor to the kings whom he also challenged. He was well educated, from a family of nobility, and was highly respected by the same leaders who also often ignored him. Israel's infidelity, demonstrated through its trust in military alliances and widespread injustice, was his constant concern. Like his 8th Century contemporary Amos, he chided his people for their injustice to the poor and empty worship. The "second Isaiah" (chapters 40-55 and 56-66) was one or two authors writing at the end of the Babylonian exile (540 B.C.E.) and afterwards. It is God's many words of peace that these Isaiahs speak most eloquently. Organized into 4 categories, here are some of the most important words God wants us to hear in our own time as well:

1. "Trust in me, not in military fortifications or alliances," says Yahweh

   — "But if you do not stand by me, you will not stand at all" (7:9b)
   — "Woe to those rebellious sons! — It is Yahweh who speaks. They carry out plans that are not mine and make alliances not inspired by me... They have left for Egypt, without consulting me, to take refuge in Pharaoh's protection, to shelter in Egypt's shadow. Pharaoh's protection will be your shame, the shelter of Egypt's shadow your confounding... For thus says the Lord yahweh, the Holy One of Israel: Your salvation lay in conversion and tranquility, your strength, in complete trust; and you would have none of it. 'No,' you said, 'we will flee on horses.' So be it, flee then! And you add. In swift chariots.' So be it, your pursuers will be swift too. A thousand will flee at the threat of one and when five threaten you will flee, until what is left of you will be like a flagstaff on a mountain top, like a signal on a hill. But Yahweh is waiting to be gracious to you, to rise and take pity on you, for Yahweh is a just God; happy are all who hope in Yahweh." (30:1-18).

2. There will be peace, but it will be the fruit of justice

   — "He will wield authority over the nations and adjudicate between many peoples; these will hammer their swords into plowshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation; there will be no more training for war" (2:4-5).
   — “For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace. Wide is his dominion in a peace that has no end, for the throne of David and for his royal power, which he establishes and makes secure in justice and integrity. From this time onwards and forever, the jealous love of Yahweh will do this” (95-7).
   — "For now I create new heavens and a new earth, and the past will not be remembered, and will come no more to peoples' minds. Be glad and rejoice for ever and ever for what I am creating, because I now create Jerusalem 'Joy' and her people 'Gladness'. I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and exult in my people. No more will the sound of weeping or the sound of cries be heard in her; in her, no more will be found the infant living a few days only, or the old ones not living to the end of their days.... They will build houses and inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit They will not build for others to live in, or plant so that others can eat. For my people shall live as long as trees, and my chosen ones wear out what their hands have made. They will not toil in vain or beget children to their own ruin, for they will be a race blessed by Yahweh, and their children with them. Long before they call I shall answer; before they stop speaking I shall have heard. The wolf and the young lamb will feed together, the lion eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no hurt, no harm on all my holy mountain, says Yahweh" (65:17-25).
   — "Once more there will be poured on us the spirit from above; then shall the wilderness be fertile land and fertile land become forest. In the wilderness justice will come to live and integrity in the fertile land; integrity will bring peace, justice give lasting security. My people will live in a peaceful home, in safe houses, in quiet dwellings — the forest shall be beaten down and the city laid low. Happy will you be, sowing by every stream, letting ox and donkey roam free" (32:15-20).
3. God wants this peace (Shalom) for all peoples, not just Israel, but again it is for the poor and those who submit to God, not the mighty and proud

— "In the days to come the mountain of the Temple of Yahweh shall tower above the mountains and be lifted higher than the hills. All the nations will stream to it, peoples without number will come to it..." (2:2)

— "The citadel of the proud is a city no longer, it will never be rebuilt. Hence a mighty people gives you glory, the city of pitiless nations holds you in awe; for you are a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress... On this mountain, yahweh will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines... On this mountain Yahweh will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples, and the shroud enwrapping all nations and will destroy Death for ever. The Lord Yahweh will wipe away the tears from every cheek; Yahweh will take away the people's shame everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has said so" (25:2-8).

— "Foreigners who have attached themselves to Yahweh to serve him and to love his name and be his servants — all who observe the sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain" (56:6).

4. But this peace must be purchased through suffering love

— "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations. He does not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He does not break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame. Faithfully he brings true justice; he will neither waver nor be crushed until true justice is established on earth, for the islands are awaiting his law" (42:1-4).

— "And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed.... If he offers his life in atonement, he shall see his heirs, he shall have a long life and through him what Yahweh wishes will be done" (53:4-12). See also 49:1-6; 50:4-9)

B. What is God saying to us through Isaiah? What is his message for our own time?

— What does it mean to trust in God and not military weapons and alliances? What events in our world make this more possible at this time? Is it worth the risk? Why or why not? Is there anything we can do individually and as groups (e.g., our Church or faith tradition as a whole) to move more in this direction?

— How do these descriptions of the "Kingdom of God" or the "Community of God" sound to you? What is your own vision of this "Kingdom" or "Community"?

— Do you really think these promises will come true some day? How? Are there signs (i.e., events) in our own time that point in this direction? Can you be part of making these promises come true? How?

— Why is it that true peace and security are based on justice and integrity? What does our country need to do to move in this direction? How can we help?

— If God intends this for peoples all over the world, especially the poor, what should our government’s policies be toward other peoples and nations (e.g., refugees, countries with lots of hunger and debt, countries ruled by repressive individuals or groups)? What kind of "patriotism" does this call for? How can you help in all this?

— True prophets don't win popularity contests. Does this scare you as you think about how you are to be a prophet? How can you become better prepared to face the risks and pain of accepting God's call?
Jeremiah Illustrates the Mission & Message of All God’s Prophets

A. Introduction

The world of Jeremiah’s time was full of wars as new empires conquered the old ones. The tiny kingdom of Judah (the southern part of what is now Israel) was caught in the middle, and during Jeremiah’s lifetime, Babylonia conquered Judah and ended its freedom as a nation. God called Jeremiah as a youth in 625 B.C.E. and he served as God’s prophet during the reigns of the last kings of Judah – Josiah (640-609), Jehoiakim (609-598), Jehoiachin (598-597), Zedekiah (597-587). After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., Jeremiah was forced to go with those who survived into exile in Egypt, where he continued to speak to them for God. Because his repeated warnings to Judah of God’s impending punishment included advising them to surrender to the Babylonians, he was accused by his enemies of being a traitor. He was imprisoned, left in a dry well, and was the target for several assassination plots.

B. Prophets are called by God to challenge their people/nation and its religious & political leaders from God’s perspective and are promised God’s protection.

1. God’s call and promise: “Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you to say… The Lord reached his hand and touched my mouth, saying ‘I am giving you the words to say, and I am sending you with authority to speak to the nations for me’” (1:7-10)

   “Go and tell the people what I command you to say. Don’t be frightened by them, or I will make you terrified while they watch. My power will make you strong like a fortress or a column of iron or a wall of bronze. You will oppose all of Judah, including its kings and leaders, its priests and people. They will fight back, but they won’t win. I, the Lord, give my word – I won’t let them harm you” (1:17-19; also 15:11, 19-21)

2. Jeremiah’s initial response: “I’m not a good speaker, Lord, and I’m too young” (1:6)

3. His later response: “I trust you for protection in times of trouble, so don’t frighten me. Keep me from failure and disgrace” (17:17-18).
   
   Questions: See pp 25-26 for your own call and response.

C. They experience God’s word as a fire burning within them which they cannot not speak

- “Your anger against Judah flames up inside me, and I can’t hold it in much longer” (6:11)
- “My anger is a fire that cannot be put out…” (15:14).
- “Your message burns in my heart and bones, and I cannot keep silent” (20:9)

   Question: Is there any message that you think God wants your life to proclaim that is beginning to “burn in your heart and bones”?

D. They warn God’s people of the consequences of their sinfulness

1. Jeremiah’s general message, in harsh and exaggerated language, is one of doom & destruction (but with a word of hope), of God’s anger against the whole nation, but especially its political and religious leaders

   - “You will tell them of doom and destruction, and of rising and rebuilding again” (1:10)
   - “You have let me announce only destruction and death” (20:8; also 15:1-9)
   - “Everyone is greedy and dishonest, whether rich or poor…” (6:13 and 8:10)
   - “They are so evil! So in my anger I will strike them like a violent storm. I won’t calm down until I have finished what I have decided to do” (23:19-20; also 4:7, 5:6, 7:18-20, 7:33-34, 9:11, 11:17-18, 15:14, 17:4, 19:3-13, 21:3-7, 25:6, 30:23-24; 32:30-32, 36:7, 44:3-8)

   Question: Does Jeremiah’s frequent descriptions of an “angry God” contradict our understanding of God as Love? In what sense might we say that God is angry?
2. **His specific warnings of the coming disaster to Judah**
   - “I am sending a windstorm from the desert…The enemy army swoops down like an eagle” (4: 12-13).
   - “We had hoped for peace and a time of healing, but all we got was terror” (8:15 and 14:19).
   - “Enemies will attack like lions from the forest or wolves from the desert” (5:6)
   - “An army from a distant country will attack you. I’ve chosen an ancient nation, and you won’t understanding their language” (5:15)
   - “We were in our fortress, but death sneaked in through our windows. It even struck down children at play and our strongest young men” (9:21)
   - These disasters also include drought and starvation (14:1-6), destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (26:6-9), and exile (8:3, 22:20-28)

**Question:** How might these descriptive phrases be applied to our nation? To others?

“I will let you be attacked by nations from the north, and especially by my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon” (25:9, 27:6, 43:10).

**Question:** Are there any enemy leaders/nations, like King Nebuchadnezzar, that God has used in the past or may be using in the present to send us a message? If so, who? And with what messages?

“I have heard groaning and crying… it was Jerusalem” (4:31)

**Question:** From where would the groaning and crying that God hears be coming today?

“They planned to do evil, and now the evil they planned will happen to them” (6:19)

**Question:** How might this apply to us today? What might this “evil” be?

E. **Why will this happen? What have the leaders and people done to deserve this?**

1. **It’s the logical or natural consequences of what we have done.**
   “Your own behavior and actions have brought this on you” (4:18)

**Question:** Name some times when your own behavior and the behavior of our nation (and others) have brought on disastrous consequences?

2. **Your infidelity and idolatry and God’s pain over it** (see also 1:16, 2:5-7, 2: 9-13, 3:21, 5:7, 5:28-29, 9:8-9, 14:8-9, 16:11, 17:1-2, 18:15, 19:4,
   - “You rejected me and worshipped false gods. You were married to me, but you were unfaithful. You even became a prostitute by worshipping disgusting gods…” (13:25-26)
   - “Did I abandon you in the desert or surround you with darkness? You are my people…” (2:31-32)
   - You broke the covenant I made with you (11:9-10)
   - “It’s all your own fault! You stopped following me, the Lord your God, and you trusted the power of Egypt and Assyria” (2:17-18) – what Abraham Heschel calls “the idolatry of might”
   - “You and your kings, your priests and prophets worship stone idols and sacred poles as if they created you and had given you life” (2:27)
   - “Don’t brag about your wisdom or strength or wealth” (9:24)

**Questions:** What false gods might we be worshipping? Is “military might” one of them? What “stone idols or sacred poles” might be symbols of the idols we worship?
3. Your disregard and exploitation of the poor to make yourselves rich

- “Some of you trap humans and make them your slaves. You are evil, and you lie and cheat to make yourself rich. You are powerful and prosperous, but you refuse to help the poor get the justice they deserve” (5:26-28; also 21:12)
- “You built a palace… by you were unfair and forced the builders to work without pay” (22:13-14)
- “You disobeyed me by not giving your [Hebrew] slaves their freedom” (34:8-22)
- “Stop taking advantage of foreigners, orphans, and widows” (7:6; also 22:1-3)

Question: Can this be said of us individually and/or as a nation? How so?

4. Your are killing innocent people

- “You killed innocent people for no reason at all. And even though their blood can be seen on your clothes, you claim to be innocent” (2:34-35; also 23:1-2)
- “People of Jerusalem, I must punish you for your injustice… Sounds of violent crimes echo within your walls; victims are everywhere, wounded and dying” (6:6-7)
- “Don’t kill innocent people” (7:6).

Questions: Who are these innocent people today and how are we killing them? Where can we find the wounded and dying victims of our individual and/or national violence?

5. And you do this without any shame

- “But just like a prostitute, you still have no shame for what you have done” (3:3).
- “Worst of all, the people of Judah pretended to come back to me” (3:10).

Question: In what ways might this be true of ourselves and our political and religious leaders?

6. You and your leaders don’t listen to me and my prophets

- “While you have been sinning, I have been trying to talk to you, but you refuse to listen” (7:13; also 25:3-9, 26:1-6, 35:15).
- “Ever since you ancestors left Egypt, I have been sending my servants the prophets to speak for me. But you have ignored me and become even more stubborn and sinful than your ancestors ever were!” (7:25-26).
- “Our leaders were stupid failures, because they refused to listen to the Lord” (10:21)
- “Instead of listening to me, they do whatever they want…” (13:10)
- “Jeremiah, some men from your home town say they will kill you, if you keep on speaking for me. But I will punish them… When I am finished, no one from their families will be left alive” (11:21-23)
- “People of Judah, don’t be too proud to listen to what the Lord has said” (13:15)

Question: How might this be true of us personally? Of our leaders?

7. Your prophets, religious leaders, and political leaders are dishonest

- “Even the prophets and priests cannot be trusted. All they offer to my deeply wounded people are empty hopes for peace” (6:14 and 8:11; also translated “Peace! Peace! They say, but there is no peace.”)
- “Lies come from the mouths of my people like arrows from a bow. With each dishonest deed their power increases, and not one of them will admit that I am God” (9:3)
- “They say they want peace, but this lie is deadly like an arrow that strikes when you least expect it” (9:8)

Questions: How might our leaders be lying to us about peace? How might this lie be “deadly”?
8. **You and your leaders are arrogant, stubborn and rebellious** (also 5:13, 6:28-30)

- “But if you are stubborn and keep on sinning, my anger will burn like a fire that cannot be put out” (4:4)
- Jeremiah to God: “The people have rebelled and rejected the Lord too many times…You punished your people for their lies, but in spite of the pain, they become more stubborn and refused to turn back to you” (5:3, 6)

**Question:** In what ways have we been stubborn and rebellious personally? In what ways have our leaders been arrogant, stubborn, and rebellious?

9. **Your worship is empty. I desire justice and mercy.**

- “What I like best is showing kindness, justice, and mercy to everyone on earth” (9:24)
- “Your bodies are circumcised, but your hearts are unchanged” (9:26)
- “More cedar in your palace doesn’t make you a better king than your father Josiah. He always did right—he gave justice to the poor and was honest. That’s what it means to truly know Me” (22:15-16)

**Questions:** How have we put our worship into practice or failed to do so? To what extent have we tried to “know God” by serving God’s poor?

10. **You are thieves and hypocrites**

“You are thieves and you have made my temple your hideout…Don’t think the temple will protect you” (7:11, 14)

**Question:** Are there any ways which our political or religious leaders used religious language and symbols to hide the truth of our misdeeds?

F. **They call the people to repentance and remind them of God’s forgiving love**

1. **There is still time**

“But Jerusalem, there is still time to be saved. Wash the evil from your hearts and stop making sinful plans” (4:14)

**Question:** What might God be saying to us today? What “sinful plans” might we be making?

“Jeremiah, test my people…Silver can be purified in a fiery furnace, but my people are too wicked to be made pure” (6:27-30)

**Questions:** How is God trying to purify us individually and as a nation? What are some of the “fiery furnaces” that God might use to free us from our blindness, stubbornness and sinfulness?
2. God passionately desires their return to their Covenant with God
“Israel, I am your Lord – come back to me! You were unfaithful and made me furious, but I am merciful and so I will forgive you… You are unfaithful children, but you belong to me. Come home!” (3:12-14; also 2:1-3, 3:19, 4:1, 6:22 and 26, 7:12, 12:1 and 16, 23:2, 25:5, 30:3, 31:3-4, 31:9, 33:24, 45:4, 50:6)

Questions: Have you ever experienced God’s forgiving love? If you were to write a letter to religious or political leaders that you thought weren’t following God’s way, how would you remind them of God’s love?

“People of Israel, you are my own dear children. Don’t I love you best of all?” (31:20)

Question: Who do you think that God loves “best of all” today? The United States? Israel? Or…? And why?

G. They offer a message of hope

1. A positive future for the people of Judah
“After Babylonia has been the strongest nation for 70 years, I will be kind and bring you back to Jerusalem, just as I have promised. I will bless you with a future filled with hope – a future of success, not of suffering” (29:10-11; generally it’s “someday” you will return: 16:14-15, or 31:2 – “when the time is right.” See also chapters 30-33, especially 31:10-11; 17:7-8; 23:1-8; 24:5-7; and 46:27-28)

Question: What words of hope do you think need to be preached to our own nation? To the world?

2. Punishment for all the other nations, especially the Babylonians, because of their idolatry and pride and their cruelty to the people of Judah
“I, the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, punished the king of Assyria, and I will also punish the king of Babylonia… You Babylonians were cruel to Israel and Judah” (50: 18, 33; also Chapters 46-51, especially 48:26-27, 49:2 and 6; 50:4-5, 11, 15, 31-33, and 38; 51:24 and 47).

Question: Can we point the finger at other nations (and/or people from different religious traditions, racial or cultural groups, etc) and not be as diligent about addressing our own sinfulness because God is passing judgment on them?

H. Prophets often use visual parables and symbolic actions to illustrate their message
- Jeremiah wears tattered shorts to demonstrate the tattering of people because of their sinfulness (13:1-11).
- He is told not to marry and have children and not go to parties or weddings to show that God “will put an end to all their parties and wedding celebrations” and everyone will die (16:9).
- He is told to preach at the pottery shop to illustrate that they are like clay in God’s (the Potter) hands, who can reshape them or discard them. God will discard them unless they repent (18:1-17).
- The clay jar (19:1-11) – “Jeremiah, smash the jar when the people are watching. Then tell them that I have also said, ‘I am the Lord All-Powerful, and I warn you that I will shatter Judah and Jerusalem just like this jar that is broken beyond repair’” (19:10-11).
- Jeremiah tells his dream about two baskets of figs – one has good figs (those who remain faithful to God, even in exile) and the other has rotten figs (those who don’t) (24:1-11).
- He puts a wooden yoke around his neck as a sign of the power of King Nebuchadnezzar who will defeat Judah if they don’t obey God (27:1 – 28:17).
• He buys a field in Judah and publicly signs the deed as Jerusalem is about to be defeated, as a sign of hope that someday they will return to Judah where they will be able to buy and sell land once again (32:1-44).
• He buries some large stones in an Egyptian town (where he was taken against his will and God’s command not to go to Egypt) as a sign that Nebuchadnezzar will come there and set his thrown over the stones and rule and punish the people of Judah (43:7-13).

Questions: Do you express your faith and moral concerns publicly – e.g., bumper sticks on cars, pins or buttons on your clothes, a Cross around your neck? Have you been part of demonstrations or vigils where you enhanced your message in some visual way?

I. They mourn for their people and plead for them to God
• “I’m burdened with sorrow and feel like giving up…My people are crushed and so is my heart. I am horrified and mourn… I wish my eyes were fountains of tears, so I could cry day and night for my people who were killed” (8:18 – 9:2).
• “If you save us, it will show how great You are. Don’t let our enemies disgrace your temple…Don’t forget that you promised to rescue us” (14:19-22; also 10:23-25 and 42:3-18).

Questions: Have you ever mourned, privately or publicly, for your community or nation or for people who have suffered greatly, perhaps even done some form of penance for them? Do you pray for people and/or for your political and religious leaders when you think they aren’t living up to what God wants?

J. They experience suffering & rejection and feel cheated and abandoned by God
• People from his hometown plot to kill him (11:18-23; also 20:1-2)
• ”Why is life so easy for sinners? Why are they so successful?… You plant them like trees. You let them prosper and produce fruit” (12:1-2)
• “I wish I had never been born! I’m always in trouble with everyone in Judah… You can see how I suffer insult after insult, all because of you, Lord… I don’t go to parties and have a good time. Instead, I keep to myself, because you have filled me with your anger. I am badly injured and in constant pain. Are you going to disappoint me, like a stream that goes dry in the heat of the summer?” (15:10, 15-18)
• “You tricked me, Lord, and I was really fooled…People never stop sneering and insulting me. Your message has brought me nothing by insults and troubles… All of my so-called friends are just waiting for me to make a mistake… Put a curse on the day I was born!” (20:7-18)
• “Some of the people said, ‘Let’s get rid of Jeremiah! We will always have priests to teach us God’s laws, as well as wise people to give us advice, and prophets to speak the Lord’s messages. So, instead of listening to Jeremiah any longer, let’s accuse him of a crime’” (18:18; also 26:7-24 where he is brought to trial).
• He was beaten and imprisoned as a traitor for “trying to join the Babylonians” (37:11-21) and other officials wanted to kill him because he was demoralizing the soldiers by calling for a surrender (38:4-13. He was put in a dry well until others pleaded his case. King Zedekiah put him under house arrest where he stayed until Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, freed him, and allowed him to stay in Judah while most were led into exile (chapters 39-40).

Questions: Have you ever felt abandoned or attacked by others because you tried to do what was right? Abandoned by God? What sustained you through those rough times?

SP 19
"Maybe For Us, Today, in This Country"

Now that you have reflected on the words of two Hebrew prophets and begun to apply their words to our own time and situation, I would like you to consider one of my own attempts to apply the words and images of the Hebrew prophets to our time and situation. These were written after weeks of careful reading of the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea. They were written at a lake and the images refer to the spacious tree and summer storm I was experiencing at the time.

I planted you as a multi-limbed tree to provide shade for all who come, but many of your branches never spread their leaves and lie half-formed and idle, deadwood, providing no relief to those who walk and work beneath.

I planted you as a multi-limbed tree to spread leaves in all directions, to reflect My light to all near and far. But many of your branches yielded not their leaves nor My light, and thus many, both near and far, know not the light of freedom that I want for all.

I planted you as a multi-colored tree to reflect the diversity and richness of My Being, to show forth the unity I desire and promise; yet your green leaves dominate; they cover over or destroy those that are darker.

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I gave you grain in abundance, fertile land, ample water and plenty of sun; but because you hoard your grain for profit, make it a political weapon, I will cover your grain with ash.

I have given you energy in abundance but because your oil and utility companies and your investment-minded people see energy as a source of huge profits, because you refuse to conserve your energy as a nation, therefore I will send you bitter winters and scorching summers. You will not have enough and you will pay a dear price until you learn to live on less, to chase not after wealth and consumption and convenience, but to chase after My ways.

I have given you technology and knowledge in abundance, but because you have converted these resources to producing weapons of death, others will make them too, and thus your resources will be further wasted and these weapons be turned against you.

I have given you land in abundance, but because you convert your food-producing resources into parking lots, shopping centers, and suburban tracts, you as well as the rest of the world will experience hunger.

I have blessed you with idealistic young people in abundance, but because you have sent them off to immoral wars or to protect your wealth, I will turn these same young people against you.

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I have given you ingenuity in abundance, but because you have converted My gift into gadgets and profits, you will be envied and hated by the poor, mourned by your possessions, and buried with your stock certificates.

I have given you rights and laws in abundance, but because you have twisted those laws and have deprived your minorities of their rights and equal justice, these people will seek reprisal in the streets of your cities.
I have given you influence in abundance, but because you have used this influence too often to put into power or prop up dictators, in the name of political expediency and narrow national self-interest, their people will overthrow these dictators, turn on you, and take your people hostage.

I have given you wealth and land in abundance, but because you plan to tear up your land to plant shell-game missiles and waste precious dozens of billions of your wealth, you will be forced to tear up more land and spend more billions to keep ahead of your enemies whom you force to keep up with you.

I have given you leisure in abundance, but because you turn that leisure into license and idleness and luxuriousness, you will become a bored, soft and fat, directionless people, glued to your television sets and its unreality.

I have given you freedom in abundance, but because you have so often converted that freedom into free enterprise and refuse to change your economic principles and structures and thereby consign the poor to their poverty and a mere trickle from your wealth, I will turn the poor of the world against you, they will outvote you in world assemblies and you will find yourselves isolated more and more.

"Why have you plowed iniquity, reaped injustice, and eaten the produce, lies? Because you have trusted in your chariots and in you host of warriors, turmoil is going to break out in your towns, and all your fortresses will be laid waste.... Turn again, then, to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and always put your trust in your God." (Hosea 10:13-14; 12: 7).

Therefore, I will send My storm to warn you and chastise you. My thunder will destroy your peace (or what you think of as peace); My winds will buffet your shores and shake your houses and tents and challenge your security; My rains will chase inside all your revelers on the beaches and scatter your skiers onto dry land; I will shake your trees violently, to dislodge the deadwood. I will prune your deadwood, though it be painful, though half your limbs be lost; but I mean to work My will. I mean to provide shade and light to all and want you to sprout new limbs that will hold not back their leaves but instead will yield them in plenty and yield them in the multitude of color that I desire.

Some questions:

1. Do you think this is an accurate reflection of the prophets' message? In what ways yes and in what ways no?

2. Do you think this is an accurate application of the prophets' message to U.S. society? In what ways yes and in what ways no?

3. What other applications/examples would you use?
True and False Prophets

God speaks to us not only through the Biblical prophets but contemporary ones as well, _some of whom may be_ famous and others just "little people" like ourselves. But we have to know how to recognize them, how to distinguish "true prophets" from "false prophets". Here are some of the differences:

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<tr>
<th>TRUE PROPHETS</th>
<th>FALSE PROPHETS</th>
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<td>Do not call attention to their own person as much as to their message.</td>
<td>Often seek personal glory and praise, and perhaps material reward.</td>
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<td>Although they may themselves be the center of controversy, are themselves persons who promote brotherhood, peace and justice.</td>
<td>Often create dissension for its own sake or to serve the goals of a very small, vested-interest group.</td>
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<td>Willing to sacrifice their life if necessary in order to be true to the message they proclaim.</td>
<td>Seldom “go the extra mile” if confronted by the threat of harm to their person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are always “persons for others”.</td>
<td>Despite a facade, will eventually come through as selfish or in serious error about the true nature of human persons</td>
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With these criteria in mind, I would like you to consider the following questions about people who have been "true prophets" for you:

— Which person or group in your life do you feel has been or now is acting as a prophetic influence on you, that is, helping you to see the direction your own life and the movement of the Spirit of God in the world?

How does that person communicate his/her message to you?

What is his/her message to you?

What characteristics of a true prophet does he/she possess?

How well are you responding to his/her message?
Five Ways of Being a Prophet

Prophets are more than protesters. There are lots of ways of being prophetic. Each of us is called to be prophetic in different ways. We may not individually do all five of the following but it would be good to have all five being practiced in every local community of faith. After reflecting on each of these five and how they have been lived out by the Hebrew prophets, contemporary prophets and our churches as a whole, identify ways you individually and your school or youth group or church/synagogue could also live them out.

A. Prophets remind people

Prophets remind people about God's special love for the poor — the orphans, widows, and aliens. They remind people of God's covenant (promise) and call to trust only in God, not in military alliances and fortifications or any other idols. God alone is to be worshipped. Jesus the prophet associated with the outcasts of his time and wants us to do the same. This is difficult in our affluent country, where the beautiful people, the rich and successful, are #1, where our suburban neighborhoods can keep us separated from God's special people. Some parents do not even allow their teens to go to the city as part of a school or church service project. The poor become invisible. Out of sight — out of mind. Prophets make the invisible visible; the inaudible audible. But siding with the poor and other victims/outcasts requires "up-side-down thinking" and probably won't make us popular, but prophets are never popular. The Hebrew prophets constantly reminded their people of God's special love for the poor, of God's personal love for Israel, of the fact that it was Yahweh who led them out of Egypt.

1. Our contemporary prophets are reminders. Elie Wiesel, for instance, keeps telling the story of the Holocaust "lest we forget." Survivors of the atomic bomb tell the story of Hiroshima over and over, for the same reason. What are some other ways contemporary prophets are reminding people?

2. What are some ways your Church or faith tradition as a whole is prophetically reminding its members and others? Read some of its prophetic statements in official documents.

3. List some ways you individually and your school, youth group, synagogue, or church could be prophets by reminding others. Even such simple things as bumper stickers on cars, banners or pictures in places of worship, or signs or buttons on our houses or clothes can be prophetic reminders.

B. Prophets interpret for people

Prophets discern or read "the signs of the times". That is, they help people understand what is happening around them, the deeper meaning of events. They help people see God's providential love or hand in the world. They help people see some of our problems as the natural consequences of our sinful actions as individuals and as nations. They unmask lies and idols, helping us see how we often make idols out of wealth and power — shopping malls into temples and nuclear weapons into "gods of metal". Jesus the prophet told parables or stories so that eyes were opened, hearts were touched, and people were moved to act courageously. The Hebrew prophets were interpreters — of God's presence in all events, of Israel's own deeds as the source of their disasters, of false prophets in their midst.

1. List some ways contemporary prophets and our Churches and faith traditions are acting prophetically by interpreting for others.

2. List some ways you can do this too; also your school, youth group, synagogue, or church.
C. Prophets protest

We are all called, on occasion, to stand up for justice, peace, truth and life and say "no" to injustice, violence, lies and death. The three most powerful social movements in the United States in the past fifty years began as protests. People began to say "no" — "no" to racial injustice, to the war in Vietnam, to male domination; "no" to policies, institutions, ways of seeing things and ways of doing things that dehumanize people. Too often people bless injustice by remaining silent, even in such common things as racial slurs. We must learn to say "no". The Hebrew prophets protested repeatedly Israel's injustice to the poor, its trust in military fortifications and alliances rather than in Yahweh, its luxuriousness in the face of poverty. There were times when Jesus the prophet protested, as with the money-changers in the temple.

1. List some ways contemporary prophets and your Church or faith tradition have been prophetic protesters. Boycotts, demonstrations, tax resistance and other forms of civil disobedience all fit in here.

2. List some you can do so too; also your school, youth group, synagogue or church.

D. Prophets are advocates

Prophetic protest must be matched by strong advocacy. That is, prophets work to change policies and institutions that do violence or injustice. They challenge policy-makers. Sometimes they organize people to work more effectively on their own behalf. The Hebrew prophets took God's word directly to Israel's political leaders, and Isaiah and Jeremiah, to some extent, served as political advisors to the kings. Jesus the prophet called on the religious leaders of his time to change their practices and policies.

1. List some ways contemporary prophets and your Church or faith tradition have involved themselves in political advocacy. Political letter-writing and other forms of lobbying are obvious examples here.

2. List some ways you can too; also your school, youth group, synagogue or church.

E. Prophets offer vision and hope

Prophets do more than denounce injustice and announce the "bad news" of the consequences for human sinfulness. They also announce the "Good News" of God's promise of Shalom and fidelity to that promise. They energize people by rekindling their vision, by reminding them of God's presence and plan for the world. They help people see the significance of their struggles, of the little things they do. Prophets are people of hope, even in the midst of disaster. Isaiah reminded Israel that through suffering the kingdom will come. Isaiah and Jeremiah promised salvation for at least a remnant. Amos, Isaiah, and others envisioned a new earth, a new creation. Jesus' entire life and message provided vision and hope.

1. List some ways contemporary prophets and your Church or faith tradition are providing vision and hope.

2. List some ways you can too; also your school, youth group, synagogue or church.
"Me, A Prophet? No Way!"

God calls each of us to be a "prophet", just as God called Jeremiah. In the first chapter of Jeremiah, we read how Jeremiah protested against this calling, claiming that he was too young to be a prophet and did not know how to speak. He was only a teenager. Well, God did not let Jeremiah get away with that excuse. And God doesn't let us get away with it either. Read these words carefully:

"The word of Yahweh was addressed to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.' I said, 'Ah, Lord Yahweh; look, I do not know how to speak: I am a child!' But Yahweh replied, 'Do not say, "I am a child". Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you — it is Yahweh who speaks!' Then Yahweh put out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me: There! I am putting my words into your mouth..." (Jeremiah 1:4-9)

The prophet Ezekiel described the prophet as a "sentry" whose responsibility it was to "sound the horn and warn the people". Read his words and consider how you might be a "sentry":

"The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows, 'Son of man, speak to the members of your nation. Say to them, 'When I send the sword against a country, the people of that country select one of themselves and post him as a sentry. If he sees the sword coming against the country, he sounds his horn to warn the people. If someone hears the sound of the hrm, but pays no attention, the sword will overtake him and destroy him; he will have been responsible for his own death. He has heard the sound of the horn and paid no attention... If, however, the sentry has seen the sword coming but has not blown his horn, and so the people are not warned and the sword overtakes them and destroys one of them,... I will hold the sentry responsible for his death. Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to my people.'" (Ezekiel 33:1-7).

Some questions:

1. Do you see the "sword coming" and have opportunities to "sound the horn"? For instance, do you see any injustices, lies, or violence at your school, home, neighborhood, church, community that should be reported or challenged?

2. Do you see any harmful behavior in your friends or others you know that you should warn them or others about?

3. Are there social issues you could recommend that you school, youth group, or other groups (e.g., Scouts or maybe even a sports team) get involved in in some way — service projects, boycotts, material aid collections, letters to corporate or political or church leaders?
"And the Lord Said, Go!"

If you are like me, you are a little scared about all this. Read the following adaptation of the call to Jeremiah and Isaiah (6:1-8) to be prophets and their responses:

And the Lord said, "Go!"
and I said, "Who, me?"
and God said, "Yes, you!"
and I said, "But I'm not ready yet
and there is company coming,
and I can't leave my kids;
you know there's no one to take my place."
And God said, "You're stalling."

Again the Lord said, "Go!"
and I said, "But I don't want to,"
and God said, "I didn't ask if you wanted to."
and I said, "Listen, I'm not the kind of person
to get involved in controversy.
Besides, my family won't like it,
and what will the neighbors think!"
And God said, "Baloney!"

And yet a third time the Lord said, "Go!"
and I said, "Do I have to?"
and God said, "Do you love me?"
and I said, "Look, I'm scared.
People are going to hate me
and cut me into little pieces.
I can't take it all by myself."
And God said, "Where do you think I'll be?"

And the Lord said, "Go!"
and I sighed, "Here I am, send me!"

Rewrite the dialogue as you would imagine it going between God and yourself. What would be your excuses?

— Go back to God's dialogue with Jeremiah. When you think about God calling you to be a prophet, perhaps not to a whole nation as Jeremiah was, but at least to a few people, how do you feel? How do you think God responds to these feelings or excuses (perhaps your youth, which was Jeremiah's excuse for resisting his call)?

— Go back to the possibilities you listed for the questions about sounding your horn and warning the people and try to figure out how God is directing you as God directed Jeremiah:

— To whom do you think God wants you to go at this point in your life?

— What do you think God wants you to say to that person or group?

— And what kinds of protection do you think God is offering you?
As we sing “God Bless America” these days, there are five words that I pray we hear and pray with conviction – “…stand beside her and guide her through the night WITH THE LIGHT FROM ABOVE…” During this long “night” of suffering and searching, it is God’s light from above that we desperately need as individuals and as a nation. And how does God give us this light? Historically for Christians, God’s light has come primarily through the Hebrew prophets culminating in the person of Jesus, and then through those who are empowered to help us interpret the message of Jesus. It behooves us, then, to read these prophetic books and the Gospels carefully and prayerfully. It is no “coincidence” that today’s Scriptures should speak to our situation as a nation in such a “prophetic” way.

Recalling God’s chilling words through the prophet Ezekiel, I have to speak these Scriptures to you today. For in Ezekiel 33: 1-6, we read that God appoints sentries or sentinels to keep watch in case the enemy comes. “If the sentry sees the sword coming and sounds the trumpet and warns the people, but the people pay no attention and the sword overtakes and kills them, I will hold them responsible for their own death. But if the sentry sees the sword coming and does not sound the trumpet and thus the people are not warned and the sword overtakes and kills them, I will hold the sentry responsible for their death. Behold, I appoint you sentry for my people.”

“Behold, I appoint you sentry for my people…”

Since I do sense that a “sword” is coming, I am compelled to read and reflect with you on today’s Word of God. For as we heard in Paul’s Letter to Timothy, “God did not send us a Spirit of timidity but a Spirit of power and love and self-control, so don’t be afraid to speak for our Lord” (2 Timothy 1: 7-8). In the Psalm for this morning, we also heard: “Bow down and worship the Lord our Creator! The Lord is our God… And if today you should hear God’s voice, harden not your heart” (Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-9).

The voice or word of God that we are asked to meditate on this morning is especially from the prophet Habakkuk. When I opened this three-chapter book earlier this week in preparation for these reflections, I was touched deeply by its entirety, much of which I would like to read to you now:

“I am Habakkuk the prophet. And this is the message that the Lord gave me. Our Lord, how long must I beg for your help before you listen? How long before you save us from all this violence? Why do you make me watch such terrible injustice? Why do you allow violence, lawlessness, crime, and cruelty to spread everywhere? (1: 1-3) “Holy Lord God, mighty rock, you are eternal, and we are safe from death. You are using those Babylonians to judge and punish others. But you can’t stand sin or wrong. So don’t sit by in silence while they gobble down people who are better than they are…” (1: 12-13)

“While standing guard on the watchtower, I waited for the Lord’s answer… Then the Lord told me: ‘I will give you my message in the form of a vision. Write it clearly enough to be read at a glance… I, the Lord, refuse to accept anyone who is proud. Only those who live by faith are acceptable to me…”’ (2: 1, 2, 4).

“You’re doomed! You stored up stolen goods and cheated others of what belonged to them… You robbed cities and nations everywhere on earth and murdered their people. Now those who survived will be as cruel to you. You’re doomed! You made your family rich at the expense of others. You even said to yourself, “I’m above the law” … You’re doomed! You built a city on crime and violence. But the Lord All-Powerful sends up in flames what nations and people work so hard to gain… You destroyed trees and animals on Mount Lebanon; you were ruthless to towns and people everywhere. Now you will be terrorized. What is an idol worth? It’s merely a false god… What can you learn from idols covered with silver or gold? They can’t even breathe. Pity anyone who says to an idol of wood or stone, ‘Get up and do something!’” (2: 6, 8-9, 12-13, 17-19).

[Habakkuk’s prayer] “This is my prayer: I know your reputation, Lord, and I am amazed at what you have done. Please turn from your anger and be merciful; do for us what you did for our ancestors…When I heard this message, I felt weak from fear, and my lips quivered. My bones seemed to melt, and I stumbled around. But I will patiently wait. Someday those vicious enemies will be struck by disaster. Fig trees may no longer bloom or vineyards produce grapes; olive trees may be fruitless and harvest time a failure; sheep pens may be empty and cattle stalls vacant – but I will still celebrate because the Lord God saves me. The Lord gives me strength. God makes my feet as sure as those of a deer and helps me stand on the mountains…” (3:1-2, 16-19)
What could God be inviting us to learn?

These prophetic words raise many questions and challenges. In terms of the questions – Do we as a nation bear any responsibility for the roots of the violence that assaulted us on September 11? Is there any way we can deal effectively with terrorism if we don’t consider its roots, the sense of oppression from which it arises? Have we strayed as a nation into idolatry? Have we placed our hopes and given our allegiance to global capitalism and military might? What could God be inviting us to learn from the events of September 11 and beyond?

In terms of challenges, first, this is, as our President put it, “a war between good and evil.” But I think that the war is being waged within this nation and even within our very souls. The spirit of good – as illustrated in the incredible love of those rescue workers who gave their lives on September 11 – is at war with the spirit of evil. The spirit of hate hit the World Trade Towers on September 11, but the spirit of love responded. Now this spirit of evil and hate wants us to sink to the level of the terrorists and retaliate in kind and worse. The challenge before each of us is not to sink to this level but stay at the level of love shown by those rescuers and to challenge our nation’s decision-makers to bring the terrorists to justice without sinking to their level.

The second challenge that these prophets raise for us this morning is our own prophetic role in sharing the Word of God with those to whom we are sent. Each of us individually and our Church community as a whole has a prophetic responsibility. If we don’t share this Word of God, who will? If we don’t ask these hard questions, who will? If we don’t offer a different perspective, who will?

The third challenge God raises through the prophet Habakkuk is to write our vision clearly so that those who see it can run with it. When the Gulf War broke out in January 1991, peace activists in St. Louis gathered at Christ Church Cathedral to search together for how to respond. After a while, I felt the need to be alone with God and begin to walk the streets of downtown St. Louis, pleading with God to help me know how to respond. Within minutes these words were on my heart – “In the face of escalating violence, escalate love!” They were so clear to me. And soon the image of a scale with two trays came to me. One tray held the boulders of violence – war, terrorism, domestic violence, racism and other forms of hate violence, media violence, etc. The other tray was full of tiny pebbles of love – smiles, kind words, all kinds of random acts of kindness, acts of forgiveness, etc.

And so this morning, I offer you the Pledge of Nonviolence as a way of escalating love in our own time and place. And on the back of this Pledge card, our Institute for Peace and Justice in St. Louis offers you this suggestion for action: “As we urge our government to address terrorism with restraint and its roots with integrity, we can address it personally as well. The spirit of violence can only be overcome by a spirit of love. The Pledge of Nonviolence gives us a concrete way of overcoming the evil spirit behind the deeds of September 11 and any acts of revenge being considered in response. Jesus weeps over our world today just as he did over his city of peace – “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if only today you know the things that make for peace” – pleading with each of us to do the tings that make for peace. We can start with these-

**Respect.** In the face of escalating words of hate, we can escalate our words of kindness toward others

**Listening.** In the face of escalating anger, we can escalate our willingness to listen non-defensively and not respond in kind.

**Forgiveness.** In the face of escalating cries for revenge, we can escalate our willingness to forgive others who have hurt us.

**Courage.** In the face of escalating acts of hate directed at Muslim and Arab people, we can escalate our courage and stand by them. We can pray with them daily and especially on Fridays. And in the fact of escalating cries for war, we can courageously and lovingly offer a different perspective.”

**Question:**
How would you have applied these prophetic Scriptures to our nation and world?
"Choice Grapes or Wild Grapes?" - Sermon for October 6, 2002
By James McGinnis at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Baltimore, MD

Readings

"Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines. Within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a winepress. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: what more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin; it shall not be pruned or hewed but overgrown with thorns and briers. I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! For justice, but hark the outcry!" (Isaiah 5:1-7)

"A vine from Egypt you transplanted; you drove away the nations and planted it. It put forth its foliage to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have you broken down its walls, so that every passerby plucks its fruit... Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right had has planted.... Then we will no more withdraw from you. Give us new life and we will call upon your name. O Lord, God of hosts, restore us. If your face shine upon us. then we shall be saved." (Psalm 80: 9,12-16.)

"Brothers and sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure. Whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.." (Philippians 4: 6-9)

"Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, "They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.” They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?’ They answered him, ‘He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times.”... (Matthew 21: 33-43)

Sermon

Thank you for inviting me back to preach and present my dramatization of the life of Francis, but why do I get such challenging texts to preach on? I've prayed over these texts and reflected with friends and have concluded that we need to reflect on them on three levels: what is God saying to us as individuals and families, as a faith community, and as a nation.

God has truly blessed us, planting for us the choicest of vines. What kind of tenants have we been? And what does God have in store for us when we don't use these blessings in the service of others, as God intended us to do? What happens when God looks for choice grapes to match the choice vines and finds wild grapes instead? We who have been so richly blessed by God, have we been a choice blessing, a mixed blessing, or a curse for others?
As an individual and parent, I hear this as an example of "tough love." Just as God built a hedge or fence around our blessings, as parents we often build hedges for our children. Some of you may be providing a college education to prepare them to be a real blessing for others. But what if they blow it - skip classes and turn into "party animals" ("wild grapes")? We cut off the payments (i.e., take down the hedge). It's the logical consequence of their actions.

But what about looking at ourselves - How have we tended the choicest vines that God has gifted us to be? What kind of fruit have we yielded for God and for God's people? Are we choice grapes or wild grapes? How widely and generously have we developed and shared our talents and other blessings? How fully do we give ourselves to those around us every day? Francis, whose feast we also celebrate today, was a blessing for everyone around him and urges us to start by loving people with our eyes, with our smile.

As a faith community, how widely and generously have we shared the faith, fellowship and financial blessings we have received? Are we paired with another local faith community who is struggling? Do we have an overseas mission? Do we open our doors to the needy around us? To those shunned by other faith communities - gays, people of color, etc? If we don't, our "HEDGE" may be torn down.

As a nation, what kind of fruit have we produced from the choicest vines God gave us? Isaiah says that "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel." And we, too, think of our country as specially blessed by God, chosen to be a beacon of light, liberty, love and peace for the rest of the world. Have we produced CHOICE GRAPES or WILD GRAPES? I'd say some of both. Among our "choice grapes" we might include the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, our Social Security system, the Peace Corps, and millions of generous individuals and groups. Among our "wild grapes" we might include slavery. Native American reservations and racism, increasing poverty within the richest nation in history, the largest military budget in the world, leading the world in arms sales, invading countries or finding others to do it for us whenever we don't like their leaders – Guatemala, Iran, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, Panama, and now Iraq.

What does God promise us in the face of such environmentally, politically, economically and militarily "wild grapes"? Hear the Word of God, O people of God, take it to heart and act on it. before it's too late, before our hedge is completely torn down. Let us commit ourselves to being the best that we can be - as individuals and families, as a faith community, and as a nation. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and he weeps now over America – "If only today you knew the things that make for peace!"

In conclusion, let us pray as the Psalmist prayed, as Jeremiah prayed, taking no joy in issuing God's judgment, but pleading for God to turn us, the people of God, around. Why have You broken down our walls...? Take care of this vine and protect what Your right hand has planted.... Restore us..."It's not too late; it's not inevitable; but it will happen if we don't mend our ways. Let us pray the Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi - "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace" - the peace of Christ - Pax Christi. not "Pax Americana."

Questions:
Have you made "choice grapes" or "wild grapes" with the gifts that God has given you? What is one thing you could do to make more "choice grapes"?

In what ways do you agree with the preacher's application of the prophet's words to our nation and in what ways do you disagree with him and why?

How would you apply this prophetic word to our nation?
Holy Week and the Call to Peacemaking –
On Being Jesus’ “Donkeys for Peace”

On Jesus’ final journey into Jerusalem as an emissary of peace
As Jesus was coming down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem after his stay the night before with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, he stopped at a vantage point where the whole of Jerusalem spread out before him. He gazed out at his “City of Peace,” and wept. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if only today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. The time will come when your enemies will build walls around you and attack you from every side. They will smash you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you because you failed to recognize that God had come to save you” (Luke 19: 41-44).

But this was not a “done deal.” This was a contingent prophesy because there was still time for Jerusalem to repent and embrace the things that make for peace. Jesus was determined to make his appeal one more time for God’s inclusive community of love, love even for one’s enemies. As a sign of his way of peace, he mounted a donkey and headed for Jerusalem. Because this was the week of Passover and large crowds of Jews would be gathering in Jerusalem, the Romans were sending in armed reinforcements to “keep the peace.” As the Roman military officers approached Jerusalem from one direction on their stallions of war, Jesus approached on his donkey of peace. Jesus knew the Hebrew scriptures and chose this symbol of nonviolent peacemaking to reinforce his message.

“Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion; shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; the warrior’s bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations” (Zechariah 9: 9-10).

On the donkey as a symbol and instrument of peace
- Jesus rides a donkey into places of violence where peace is especially needed.
- The donkey goes all the way in to the situation.
- Jesus isn’t a warrior on a fast horse to ride in, inflict damage and escape; but on a donkey he goes in to stay.
- The donkey runs the same risk of being killed as its rider.

On being Jesus’ donkeys for peace
- Jesus won’t get to as many places or as fast if we and other donkeys aren’t willing to be ridden into those situations. These situations could include
  * interpersonal situations – family, school, neighborhood or workplace conflicts.
  * wider and deadlier conflicts – fights, riots, war zones
  * institutional or social-political situations – in our Church, educational systems, government policies, corporate practices, the criminal justice system.
- What God said to Jeremiah, Jesus says to us: “Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you to say. And don’t be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you” (Jeremiah 1: 7-8).

Questions:
What questions or insights does this interpretation of the Scriptures raise for you?

What are some of the situations in your life that need the peace of Christ? And how could you be Jesus’ “donkey for peace” in any of them?
“When Silence Is Betrayal”
by Martin Luther King, Jr., at Riverside Church, New York, April 4, 1967

"A time comes when silence is betrayal. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men [sic] do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do in the case of dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty. But we must move on.

"Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak… For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us…

"We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers. I think of them, too, because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries….I speak for those whose land is being laid to waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation…[for] I see this war as an enemy of the poor…"

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

"A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth… A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war, ‘This way of settling differences is not just.’ A nation that continues year and year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death… [I want] to save the soul of America… No one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war…

"America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war… We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism [today, terrorism] grows and develops…"

"This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all mankind. We can no longer afford to worship the God of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate…

"We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who posses power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight. Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter – but beautiful – struggle for a new world… The choice is ours…”
Questions: What does King mean in each of the highlighted sentences? What aspects do you agree with and why? What aspects do you disagree with and why?

At what point does “silence become betrayal”? Betrayal of what?

In his “Letter from a Birmingham City Jail, Dr. King laments, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

Have you been part of “the appalling silence of the good people” in the face of violence and injustice? How so?

Is there is some policy or specific kind of violence or injustice that you should speak out on?

If so, how could you add your voice to those already speaking on the issue?

If you were to make a banner or sign expressing your concern, what would it say and how would you highlight your message? (see the two “sandwich board signs” on page 34 as an example of how one person expressed his concern)
Silent Witness for Peace
at the White House

By Jim McGinnis, April 14-18, 2003

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Standing silently in “white face” and wearing my
“sandwich board” poster across the street from the White
House during the war attracted hundreds of on-lookers
each day. When Mairad Corrigan Maguire, the Nobel
Peace Laureate from N. Ireland, knelt beside me two
hours later and displayed her sign expressing sorrow for
the Iraqi people, along with several others with their
signs and banners, then we really gathered crowds. None
of us spoke, but many on-lookers did. While a few were
positive, most were negative.

I realized that I was thankful...

One comment made me think enough that I changed my
sign the last two days of the witness - “What about all
those Iraqi children that were freed from that prison?” As I
thought about it, I realized that I was thankful for that and
for the possibility of a greater measure of political and
religious freedom for Iraqis without Saddam Hussein. I
weren’t protesting because we approved of his repressive
regime. So my new sign read: “Give thanks for those freed
or spared. Mourn for those killed or maimed.” with pictures
of 3 Iraqi children killed and their father maimed, plus
pictures of 2 US service men killed and their grieving
mothers. Witnessing to the truth as one sees it also means
being open to the truth of others.
Silent Witness for Peace at the White House (Holy Week 2003)
By Jim McGinnis

Standing alone across the street from the White House during spring break week for many schools (and Holy Week for Christians) meant that about a thousand people would pass by me every day. When I put on my “white face” with painted tears coming from my eyes and a cross on my forehead and then hung my “sandwich board” sign over my shoulders, I was a “marked man” inviting passers-by to check me out and they did. When Mairead Corrigan Maguire, the Nobel Peace Laureate from N. Ireland, knelt beside me two hours later and displayed her sign expressing sorrow for the Iraqi people, along with several others with their signs and banners, then we really gathered crowds. None of us spoke, but many on-lookers did, and many of their remarks were negative:

- “Fruitcakes!” two children shouted over and over, after their father set the example himself.
- One elderly woman on a bicycle stopped in front of me, read the sign, and then angrily said “we have a great country and you, you write that bullshit!”
- After one angry remark, a woman returned with an encore – “get a job!”
- One group was especially mocking. After lots of remarks, three of them came up and stood on either side and in front of my sign and jeered with thumbs down, had their picture taken, and then hurried off laughing.
- “What about all those Iraqis Saddam tortured and killed?”
- “The war’s over; don’t you get it?”

Some comments were positive, especially from Europeans, many of whom thanked me/us for being there.

- “You show much courage, much courage.”
- “People in Europe all are against this war. It is good that you are here saying this to your own government.”
- One young teen asked her father to take her picture next to me. “Next to that crazy guy?” he asked. “He’s not crazy, dad,” was her reply.
- One older woman from Denmark spoke at length and in real pain to one of our group, beginning with “you had so much sympathy from the whole world after 9/11 and now you’re squandering it all.”

One comment made me think enough that I changed my sign the last two days of the witness - “What about all those Iraqi children that were freed from that prison?” As I thought about it, I realized that I was thankful for that and for the possibility of a greater measure of political and religious freedom for Iraqis without Saddam Hussein. I/we weren’t protesting because we approved of his repressive regime. So my new sign read: “Give thanks for those freed or spared. Mourn for those killed or maimed,” with pictures of 3 Iraqi children killed and their father maimed, plus pictures of 2 US service men killed and their grieving mothers. Witnessing to the truth as one sees it also means being open to the truth of others.

My reflection on this silent witness during Holy Week included the Scripture readings for the week, some from the servant songs of Isaiah. These readings provided a helpful way of deepening my understanding of the passion of Jesus.

1. “Here is my servant. I have made him strong. He is my chosen one; I am pleased with him. I have given him my Spirit, and he will bring justice to the nations. He won’t shout or yell or call out in the streets… He won’t quit or give up until he brings justice everywhere on earth… I chose you to bring justice, and I am here at your side. I selected and sent you to bring light and my promise of hope to the nations…” (Isaiah 42: 1-6), Yes, our witness is a silent one on behalf of justice to the nations, especially those threatened by US plans to rid the world of “rogue nations.”

2. “I am completely worn out; my time has been wasted. But I did it for the Lord God and God will reward me. Even before I was born, God chose me to serve him and lead back the people of Israel. So the Lord has honored me and made me strong. Now the Lord says to me, ‘It isn’t enough for you to be merely my servant.”
You must do more than lead back survivors from Israel. I have placed you here as a light for other nations; you must take my saving power to everyone on earth.” (Isaiah 49: 4-6) Yes, I was worn out by all my presentations to schools on responding to the war with Iraq and all the other efforts I was involved in. And they didn’t stop the war. But I knew that it was important that I do whatever I could and be generous in doing so. I did not want to look back on the war and regret that there were things I could have done but didn’t.

3. “The Lord God gives me the right words to encourage the weary. Each morning he awakens me eager to learn his teaching; God made me willing to listen and not rebel or run away. I let them beat my back and pull out my beard. I didn’t turn aside when they insulted me and spit in my face. But the Lord God keeps me from being disgraced. So I refuse to give up, because I know God will never let me down.” (Isaiah 50: 4-7). Yes, I did offer my face and back to thousands of people during the week, some of whom chose to mock and insult me. It was a humbling experience but helped me to understand a little of what Jesus went through.

I wanted to be careful to invite but not force anyone to respond to me. So I held out my handout in one hand and a pen in the other, inviting people to read more about my statement and/or to sign the poster over my back, reading: “Mr. Bush: Not in our names do you do this.” 100+ people in St. Louis signed my poster on Palm Sunday, some at the “Rock” Church and the others at the evening vigil at St. Louis University. About 40 people, some of them youth, accepted my invitation at the White House and signed my “back.”

My reflection on the week also included a post-vigil hour with the other vigilers. One of Mairead’s reflections touched me in a special way, especially because she was at the White House from noon to 2 PM for 40 days and fasted on only liquids the whole time:

- “As I knelt there each day, I realized I was doing the best I could. I told a group of Catholic Workers last night not to beat themselves up over not being able to stop the war. We did the best we could and the rest is in the hands of God.”

- “I was struck by the basic goodness of people. For instance, the cab driver who picked me up the first day asked me what I was doing. When I told him, he was impressed and offered to pick me up at the same time each day and do it for free. As a result of our daily conversations, this Muslim man named Jamaal started coming to the weekly prayer service Pax Christi organized at Wednesday noon and by the end of Lent he was bringing his wife and daughter as well.”

Questions:
What would you have done if you had passed by this witness? Would you have taken one of his flyers? Would you have signed the petition on his back? Would you have said anything to him? Why or why not?

What issue or policy is so important to you that you would consider doing something like this?

How could you dramatize your message?
Christian Prophets for Peace, for the Poor, and for the Earth

Voices of Prophets in the US

Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle

Dorothy Day

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Cesar Chavez

The Catholic Bishops of Appalachia

Voices of Prophets outside the US

Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador

Fr. Elias Chacour of Palestine

Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Northern Ireland

Francis of Assisi

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa
In 1981, Archbishop Hunthusaen of Seattle spoke as a prophet for peace and challenged US Christians and all people of good will to look more closely at our nation’s nuclear policy with the eyes of faith. As the Hebrew prophets did over and over again, he spoke for a security based on God’s ways, not weapons of war, especially those that can annihilate entire cities, nations and ultimately the whole world.

"As followers of Christ, we need to take up our cross in the nuclear age... Our security as people of faith lies not in demonic weapons which threaten all life on earth. Our security is in a loving, caring God... A choice has been put before us: anyone who wants to save one's life by nuclear arms will lose it; but anyone who loses one's life by giving up those arms for Jesus' sake, and for the sake of the Gospel of love, will save it...

How can such a process, of taking up the cross of nonviolence, happen in a country where our government seems paralyzed by arms corporations? In a country where many of the citizens, perhaps most of the citizens, are numbed into passivity by the very magnitude and complexity of the issue while being horrified by the prospect of nuclear holocaust?...

We have to refuse to give incense — in our day, tax dollars — to our nuclear idol... Form 1040 is the place where the Pentagon enters all of our lives, and asks our unthinking cooperation with the idol of nuclear destruction. I think the teaching of Jesus tells us to render to a nuclear-armed Caesar that which Caesar deserves — tax resistance. And to begin to render to God alone that complete trust which we now give through our tax dollars, to a demonic form of power. Some would call what I am urging 'civil disobedience'. I prefer to see it as obedience to God."

Questions:
Using the criteria for “true and false prophets,” how would you characterize Archbishop Hunthausen?

Do you agree that our security should be in a loving God and not in "demonic weapons"? Why or why not?

What does he mean by "our nuclear idol"? Do you agree with his image? Why or why not?

Do you agree with his interpretation of Jesus' words: "Render to Caesar ..."? Why or why not? Why does he call this "divine obedience" rather than "civil disobedience"?
Dorothy Day, A Prophet of Justice and Peace

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was a journalist, publisher, nurse, radical Communist in her youth, a mother, a wife for a short time, founder of houses of hospitality known as Catholic Worker houses, which is the title of the penny a copy newspaper she wrote and published. She lived for decades with the poor, standing with street people, southern Blacks, farm workers, prisoners, and went to jail in solidarity with them. As a pacifist, she resisted war to the point of being jailed for not participating in air raid drills. A deeply religious person, she worshipped daily. Her whole life was a living out of the title of one of her biographies, “LOVE IS THE MEASURE by which we will be judged... Hell is not to love anyone”, she wrote. She truly lived a life of solidarity with the poor, especially in the following ways.

1. She was touched by the reality of the poor as a teen

Quote: Walking the streets of the poor and the workers at 15, she said “that from then on my life was to be linked to theirs, their interests were to be mine: I had received a call, a vocation, a direction in my life.”

Questions: What have been your encounters with the poor and working people? How have you felt called to respond?

2. She grieved with the poor

Quote: “Let me say that the sight of a line of men waiting for food, dirty, ragged, obviously sleeping out in empty buildings, is something that I will never get used to. It is a deep hurt and suffering that food is often all we have to give. Our houses will not hold any more men and women, nor do we have workers to care for them...”

Question: How do you feel when you read or hear about homeless people today? Do you think you would feel differently if you saw them every day? If you got to know any of them?

3. She committed herself to the works of mercy

Quotes: At age 21, as a nurse: “What good am I doing my fellow man — they are sick and there are not enough nurses to care for them... It’s the poor that are suffering. I’ve got to care for them.”

“The thing is to recognize that not all are called to demonstrate in this way, to fast, to endure the pain and the long drawn out, nerve-wracking suffering of prison life. We do what we can, and the whole field of the works of mercy is open to us...”

Questions: Are there opportunities for you to care in some way for the sick or poor even now in your life? What works of mercy are open to you now?

4. She provided hospitality, first in her own apartment in the 1930s and then a whole series of Catholic Worker houses

Quote: When asked how long the homeless could stay in her houses, she answered: “We let them stay forever. They live with us, they die with us, and we give them a Christian burial. We pray for them after they are dead. Once they are taken in, they become members of the family. Or rather they always were members of the family. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Question: Is there some way you can provide hospitality to someone in need, opening your heart some more even if you can’t open your own home at this time? Would your family be willing to consider some form of hospitality?

5. She committed herself to a life of voluntary poverty

Quote: “Let’s all try to be poorer. My mother used to say, ‘Everyone take less, and there will be room for one more.’ There was always room for one more at our table.”

Question: Is there something you could do without or take less of and share the savings with someone in need? Do you agree that we should “try to be poorer”? Why or why not? If so, how would you go about it personally?

6. She worked for social change

Quote: “Disabled men, without arms and legs, blind men, consumptive men with all their manhood drained out of them by industrialism; farmers gaunt and harried with debt; mothers weighed down with children at their skirts, in their arms, in their wombs; people ailing and rickety — all this long procession of desperate people called to me. Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?”

Question: What do you think Dorothy did to try to change the social order that permits hunger and homelessness in our country? What have others done? What could you do to help change this social order?
7. She created alternative institutions, a new social order
Quote: “But bread lines are not enough, hospices are not enough. I know that we will always have men on the road. But we need communities of work, land for the landless, true farming communes, cooperatives and credit unions... The heart hungers for the new social order where justice dwells.”
Question: Are there ways you can support people building this new social order — cooperatives, credit unions, farm worker unions, etc.?

8. She resisted war because it kills and robs the poor
Quote: “Silence means consent, and we cannot consent to the militarization of our country without protest. Since we believe that air raid drills are part of a calculated plan to inspire fear of the enemy, instead of the love which Jesus Christ told us we should feel, we must protest these drills. It is an opportunity to show we mean what we write. Then we repeat over and over that we are put here on this earth to love God and our neighbor.”
Question: Do you think our country is too militarized? Why or why not? What effect does it have on the poor? Are there ways you can protest or resist this militarization?

9. She suffered in jail for her commitment, which helped her identify even more with the poor
Quote: “We were, frankly, hoping for jail. Then we would not be running a house of hospitality, we would not be dispensing food and clothing, we would not be ministering to the destitute, but we would be truly one of them.”
Question: Would you ever be willing to go to jail for your beliefs? Are there other things you would be willing to suffer for those beliefs? How is suffering connected with “solidarity”?

10. She accompanied the poor through fasting and prayer
Quote: “I had offered my fast in part for the victims of famine all over the world, and it seemed to me that I had very special pains... a kind I had never known before which seemed to pierce to the very marrow of my bones as I lay down at night.”
Questions: Have you ever felt hunger or fasted? How might it help you become more aware and concerned about hungry people? How might you start?

11. She reflected prayerfully on her journey into solidarity
Quotes: “With prayer, one can go on cheerfully and even happily, while without prayer, how grim is the journey. Prayer is as necessary to life as breathing.”
― “There I offered up a special prayer, a prayer which came with tears and anguish, that some way would open up for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor.”
— As a result, she was able to see Christ in the poor: “Christ is with us today, not only in the Blessed Sacrament and where two or three are gathered together in His Name, but also in the poor.”
Question: How could you be more prayerful and how do you think this would help?
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King was born on January 15, 1929, was ordained a Baptist minister in 1948, married Coretta Scott in 1953, with whom he parented four children before being killed in Memphis, TN, April 4, 1968. His civil rights work began in 1955 with the Montgomery bus boycott. In 1957, he was elected president of the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His famous “I Have a Dream” speech was delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, August 28, 1963. On December 10 of that same year, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. 1965 saw the famous Selma to Montgomery march and the signing of the Voting Rights Act. By 1967, Dr. King was outspoken in his criticism of the Vietnam War and announced the “Poor People’s Campaign” to help the poor of all races. It was during a campaign to help the sanitation workers of Memphis that he was killed. His message of peace and justice — Shalom and reconciliation — is a comprehensive one, both visionary and practical. He is a true prophet — a spokesperson for God.

1. His dream of reconciliation means human oneness

Quotes: “And so today I still have a dream. People will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers and sisters. I still have a dream today that one day every person of color in the world will be judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin... I still have a dream today. Justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. I still have a dream today — that war will come to an end, that individuals will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and nations will no longer rise up against nations. Neither will they study war any more. I still have a dream.” (Christmas sermon, Dec. 24, 1967).

Questions: Is this a “realistic” dream? Why or why not? How does it compare with your own dreams for your country and world?

2. His dream includes reconciliation between rich and poor

Quote: “Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. No individual or nation can be great if it does not have concern for the ‘least of these’. In the final analysis, the rich must not ignore the poor, because both rich and poor are tied in a single garment of destiny... the agony of the poor diminishes the rich, and the salvation of the poor enlarges the rich...” (Oslo, 1964)

Questions: What parts of this do you agree with and/or disagree with and why? What does he mean by “a single garment of destiny”?

3. Peace/reconciliation requires confronting militarism

Quote: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” (Riverside Church, New York, 1967)

Question: What does he mean by “spiritual death”? Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?

4. Peace/reconciliation requires confronting materialism (see p. 52)

5. Reconciliation, then, clearly requires justice (a “positive peace”)

Quote: “I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that our greatest stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice; who constantly says ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action.’” (Letter from a Birmingham City Jail).

Questions: What are the differences between a negative peace and a positive peace? Are there situations of negative peace in your life, school or community that you could challenge in some way? Is he fair to “white moderates”? Why or why not?

6. Peace/reconciliation requires surfacing conflict, confronting oppressors

Quote: “Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.” (Letter from a Birmingham City Jail).

Questions: Do you think King was correct in his defense of direct action? Why or why not? Are there situations in your life, school or community that need such action? How could you help surface the issues?
7. Reconciliation is ultimately loving one’s enemies, without which we cannot know God

Quote: "... We are traveling along a road called hate, in a journey that will bring us to destruction and damnation... Love even for enemies is the key to the solution of the problem of our world... ‘Love your enemies that you may be children of your God who is in heaven.’ We are called to this difficult task in order to realize a unique relationship with God. We are potential children of God. Through love that potentiality becomes actuality. We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of God’s holiness.” (STRENGTH TO LOVE, pp. 41, 47)

Questions: How could love of enemies be the key to solving all the problems of our world? How does this enable us to know God? What does this mean?

8. Love of enemies starts with forgiveness

Quote: "It is impossible even to begin the act of loving one’s enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity, over and over again, of forgiving those who inflict evil and injury upon us... Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning... The evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship...” (STRENGTH TO LOVE, 42-3)

Questions: Have you ever experienced this reality? Are there situations in your own life where you could take this step?

9. Love of enemies next requires recognizing the good and evil in everyone

Quote: “There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies. When we look beneath the surface, beneath the impulsive evil deed, we see within our enemy-neighbor a measure of goodness and know that the viciousness and evilness of the acts are not quite representative of all that the person is... Then we love our enemies by realizing that they are not totally bad and that they are not beyond the reach of God’s redemptive love.” (STRENGTH TO LOVE, p. 43)

Questions: Do you agree? Why or why not? What does it mean to be within reach of God’s redemptive love?

10. Love of enemies & interracial reconciliation require suffering love

Quote: “There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until the oppressed develop the capacity to love their enemies. The darkness of racial injustice will be dispelled only by the light of forgiving love... While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community. To our most bitter opponents we say: ‘We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force... Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you... Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be you assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we will win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” (STRENGTH TO LOVE, pp. 48-9)

Questions: How did King show this kind of love? Is “soul force” more powerful than “physical force”? Was it “successful”? What is the “double victory” he is speaking of? How could you practice this kind of love in your own life?

11. Nonviolence is the only means to peace/reconciliation

Quote: “Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts. Blacks of the US, following the people of India, have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation. Sooner or later, all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace... I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmended truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.” (Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Dec. 10, 1964)

Questions: What events in history tend to prove King right? What events raise doubts about his convictions? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez was born in 1927 in Arizona and lived on a small farm that failed by 1937. Thus, his life as a migrant worker began, mostly in the San Juquin Valley of California. By the time he dropped out of school as a 7th grader, he had attended more than 30 schools but could hardly read or write. By the early 1950s he began doing community organizing and started a tiny National Farm Workers Association in the early 1960s. In 1965, he led 500 workers on their first strike, for a $1.40/hour minimum wage. But "La Causa" ("the cause") and "Viva la huelga!" ("long live the strike!") began to echo across the United States and overseas, as churches, unions, and many others joined in an international boycott of California grapes, and later lettuce, that helped to bring more justice to farm workers. Cesar’s famous 25-day fast in 1968 (see quote #1) brought purification to the movement as well as leaders like Robert Kennedy and Dorothy Day to his bedside. His commitment to nonviolent social change was rooted in the teaching of Gandhi and Jesus, as he sought the liberation of both his oppressed farm workers and their oppressors. He wanted "liberty and justice for all" and continues this commitment into the 1990s.

1. Commitment/solidarity is total (at the end of his fast)

Quote (masculine language changed): "It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life. I am convinced that the truest act of courage ... is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be a full human being is to suffer for others. God help us be full human beings."

Questions: What do you think were the sources of his courage and willingness to sacrifice so much? Do you think he is right about what it means to be a “full human being”?

2. The suffering of the workers and their courageous struggle

Quote (from his 1969 letter to agribusiness leaders): “As your industry has experienced, our strikers here in Delano ... are well trained for this struggle. They have been under the gun, they have been kicked and beaten and herded by dogs; they have been cursed and ridiculed, they have been stripped and chained and jailed, and they have been sprayed with the poisons used in the vineyards. They have been taught not to lie down and die or to flee in shame, but to resist with every ounce of human endurance and spirit. To resist not with retaliation in kind but to overcome with love and compassion, with ingenuity and creativity, with hard work and long hours, with stamina and patient tenacity, with truth and a public appeal, ... and with prayer and fasting. They were not trained in a month or even in a year; after all, this new harvest season will mark our fourth full year of the strike... Time accomplishes for the poor what money does for the rich.”

Questions: What gave these workers the courage to do what they did? What does he mean by “Time accomplishes for the poor what money does for the rich”?

3. Self-determination is so important to the human spirit

Quote: “What causes a woman striker to picket and demonstrate, peacefully and nonviolently, and then be arrested as a common criminal?... What would cause teenage boys and girls to go to school without a new pair of shoes or go to school with the same old clothes and do without noon lunch?...We say that what causes this is what causes other people in our country and in other parts of the world — a spirit of independence and freedom — the spirit that they want to change things and that they want to be independent and they want to be able to run their own lives....”

Questions: Have you ever felt this same desire for independence? Why is a “redistribution of power” more essential to justice than a “redistribution of goods”?  

4. Solidarity among the poor is essential

Quote: “It is our belief that in working together we are going to be able to bring justice to all of these people who suffer the pains of injustice. In working together as one people, we will one day be proud to know that it was our generation who was responsible for eliminating the inhuman treatment of workers and other minorities and other poor people....”

Questions: Why is such solidarity across racial lines so important? In what way is Jesse Jackson’s “Rainbow Coalition” similar to Chavez?

5. Nonviolent social change has deep spiritual roots

Quote (reflecting on the famous 300-mile march to the state capitol): “The penitential procession is also in the blood of the Mexican-American, and the Delano March will therefore be one of penance — public penance for the sins of the strikers, their own personal sins as well as their yielding perhaps to feelings of hatred and revenge in the strike itself. They hope by the March to set themselves at peace with the Lord, so that the justice of their cause will be purified of all lesser intentions.”

Questions: Why was “penance” so important in his campaigns? Would it make social change campaigns more “effective”? Why or why not?
Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, Prophets for the Poor and the Earth
(from THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME, 1975)

1. Corporate America shapes our values.
In their analysis of poverty and powerlessness in Appalachia, the Catholic bishops of that region see in the US economic system powerful forces - technology and the profit motive - that have produced some real benefits but which also have been perverted into an “idolatrous power”.

“This power overwhelms the good intentions of noble people. It forces them to compete brutally with one another. It pushes people into ‘conspicuous consumption’ and ‘planned obsolescence.’ It delivers up control to a tiny minority whose values then shape our social structures.”

Questions: What is this power and is it as strong as the bishops claim? Do you feel “pushed into conspicuous consumption”? Why or why not” Who is this “tiny minority”? What are their values? Do you think they “shape our social structures”? Why or why not?

2. Their main value is consumption.
“Many times before, outside forces have attacked the mountain’s dream. But never before was the attack so strong. Now it comes with cable TV, satellite communications, giant ribbons of highway driving into the guts of the land. The attack wants to teach people that happiness is what you buy - in soaps and drinks, in gimmicks and gadgets, and that all of life is one big commodity market. It would be bad enough if the attack only tried to take the land, but it wants the soul too.”

Questions: What do they mean by “all of life is one big commodity market”? Is that the message you hear on TV? How is this an “attack on the soul”? How has it attacked your own soul?

3. They push power while God exalts the lowly.
“There’s an even bigger consumption problem among the rich - consumption not just of luxuries, but of power - the power to shape economic structures, political structures, cultural structures, all in the service of more waste, more profit, more power.”

Questions: Is there a fundamental contradiction here between affluent North American values and our religious traditions? Do you feel drawn to wanting power? In what ways? Which of these ways do you think are good and which are not?

4. Whose side are we on? What do we choose?
“Thus, there must be no doubt that we who must speak the message of the One who summoned Moses and who spoke through Jesus of Nazareth and who keeps the Spirit alive on behalf of justice for so many centuries, can only become advocates for the poor... In a profound sense the choices are simple and stark: death or life, injustice or justice, idolatry or the Living God.”

Questions: Why do so few people really stand with the poor in our society? What does it mean to choose life? To choose justice? To choose the Living God? How does this make us different from others? What are they choosing? Is it hard to be different? What can you do about that?
Oscar Romero

Oscar Romero was not the prophet and champion of the poor in 1977 that he became by the time he was martyred on March 24, 1980. Most of the progressive religious and political leaders in El Salvador were disappointed when he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. But in those three years he was converted. The assassination of his close priest friend Rutilio Grande and others touched him deeply. But it was probably the poor people of El Salvador that moved him the most — their love, suffering, and fidelity. “With this people, it is not difficult to be a good shepherd,” he said several times. Oscar Romero truly entered into solidarity with the poor. As a result, he became the prophet and saint that he is. He lived this solidarity in many ways:

1. He saw things from their perspective
   Quote: “Only by listening to the cry of the poor from a starting point in the data and their analysis, on the one hand, and on the other by hearing the word of Jesus and his church, shall we be able to find the solution, and the pastoral response, to any of our problems” (Third Pastoral Letter).
   Questions: To whom do we usually listen? What solutions would we find to our own national problems if we listened to the poor and took the Bible seriously? How can you hear more clearly the cry of the poor and the word of Jesus?

2. He was their “voice” and told their stories
   Quote: “These homilies are meant to be the voice of this people. They are meant to be the voice of the voiceless” (July 29, 1977)
   Question: How can you be a voice of the voiceless in your own country and in Central America?

3. He grieved with them
   Quote: “I love their names... I just broke down and cried when I heard [of their assassination].” “We suffer with those who have suffered so much... We suffer with the lost, those who have had to run away and who do not know what is happening to their families... We are with those who are being tortured...” (at Aguilares, the parish where Rutilio Grande and others were assassinated)
   Question: Have you ever suffered grief over an injustice done to someone else? If not, what would it take to enable you to feel such grief too?

4. He helped them see their own dignity
   Quotes: “You are the image of the divine victim ‘pierced for our offenses,’ of whom the first reading speaks to us this morning.” “The glory of God is the living poor person” (conclusion to the Louvain address). “Once we were nonpersons, and a nonpeople; now we are persons, and a people.”
   Question: Is there any way you can personally help a poor person feel like a real human being with dignity?

5. He denounced injustice
   Quotes: “In the name of God, then, and in the name of this suffering people, whose screams and cries mount to heaven, and daily grow louder, I beg you, I entreat you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!” (March 23, 1980) “I shall never tire of denouncing the outrages of arbitrary arrest, disappearance, and torture.” (June 24, 1979)
   Question: What specific injustices do you feel you should denounce (at school, in your neighborhood, city, as well as the larger world)? And how?

6. He denounced the rich and their political protectors and called them to conversion
   Quotes: “What you have, you have stolen. You have stolen from the people, who perish in misery” (March 18, 1979). “Until the idolaters of the things of earth are converted to the one true God, they will continue to be our country’s greatest threat” (November 4, 1979). “When the political right sees any threat to its economic privileges, it moves heaven and earth to keep its idol intact” (November 11, 1979)
   Question: Why does he call the rich “idolaters”? How are their possessions actually “stolen goods”?
   Quotes: “I call on the oligarchy to cooperate in the popular process. You are the principal agents of change in this hour of destiny. On you depends, in large part, the cessation of this violence. Be reconciled with God and your fellow human beings” (March 16, 1979). “I wish to issue a brotherly, pastoral call to the oligarchy to be converted and live. Share what you are and have” (February 24, 1980).
   Questions: How can the non-poor be “reconciled” with the poor? How does this apply to you?
7. He challenge social structures that exploited the poor

Quotes: “We must go to the root if we want to transform our society. If we want the violence to stop, if we want our whole disease to stop, we have to go to the root of the disease. And here is the root: social injustice” (September 30, 1979)

“A genuine Christian conversion today must discover the social mechanisms that make marginalized persons of the worker or campesino... We must all ferret these mechanisms... lest we be accomplices of a machinery that afflicts our people with ever-increasing poverty, marginalization, and need... Only then shall we be able to find true peace, in justice. And so the church supports whatever fosters structural change” (December 16, 1979)

Questions: What are some of the causes of injustice to the poor in general? What are some changes you can make on a personal level, in an institution with which you are connected, and/or with government policy that might help foster this structural change in El Salvador?

8. He offered them a vision of hope

Quote: “The liberation cry of this people is a cry that ascends to God, and there is nothing, there is no one, that can hold it back any longer” (January 27, 1980). “Christ will make this sun to shine that is the campesino... He wants it to shine, this sun of justice and truth” (July 29, 1979).

Question: More than 10 years later, violence and injustice continue. Is their hope “realistic”? How do such hopes become reality? Does it depend on you in some way?

9. He shared their risks and persecution

Quotes: [in refusing secret service protection] “I hereby inform the president that, rather than my own security, what I should like to have is security and tranquility for 108 families and their ‘disappeared’... A shepherd seeks no security as long as the flock is threatened” (June 3, 1979).

“I rejoice, brothers and sisters, that our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor, and for seeking to become incarnate in the interests of the poor... How sad it would be, in a country where such horrible murders are being committed, if there were no priests among the victims!...The church suffers the lot of the poor: persecution...” (February 17, 1980) “A church that suffers no persecution, but enjoys the privileges and support of the powers of this world—that church has good reason to be afraid! But that church is not the true church of Jesus Christ” (March 11, 1979)

Question: What risks are you willing to take for justice? Are you willing to be persecuted in some way?

10. He gave his life for the poor

Quote: “As a pastor I am bound by a divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that includes all Salvadorans, even those who are going to kill me. If they manage to carry out their threats, I shall be offering my blood for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. Martyrdom is a grace from God that I do not believe I have earned. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of the hope that will soon become a reality... You can tell them, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon them, and I bless those who may carry out the killing. But I wish that they could realize that they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the church of God—the people—will never die.” (March 10, 1980).

Questions: How could he feel such compassion for those who opposed him so strongly? Name one cause, person, or value you would be willing to be persecuted for.
Elias Chacour

Elias Chacour was born in 1939 and lived in a small Palestinian village surrounded by orchards and rugged pastures. The people, proud of the Christian heritage which they could trace back to the first century, lived at peace with their Jewish neighbors. Early in 1947, their quiet life ended, as Jewish people fought for a larger state of Israel than was given them by the United Nations. Thousands were killed on both sides and nearly a million Palestinians were forced into refugee camps.

As an exile in his own native land, Elias began a life-long struggle with his love for the Jewish people and the world's misunderstanding of Palestinians. He became a priest, was the first Palestinian to earn a degree from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and has been building schools, libraries, community centers, and youth clubs throughout Israel's Galilee region (Palestine). He travels around the world on behalf of his Palestinian people and for Jewish-Palestinian reconciliation. He is convinced of the need for nonviolence and has risked his life for his convictions. The following quotations are taken from his inspiring autobiography, BLOOD BROTHERS.

1. Reconciliation requires the restoration of human dignity

Quotes: “As a Christian do you speak out against the actions of your enemies—or do you allow them to crush the life out of you? ... The first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity. This was the third choice that ran like a straight path between violent opposition and calcified, passive non-resistance. If I were really committing my life to carry God's message to my people, I would have to live up, as Jesus had, the men and women who had been degraded and beaten down. Only by regaining their shattered human dignity could they begin to be reconciled to the Israeli people, whom they saw as their enemies.” (p. 146)

Questions: Why is this the first step toward reconciliation? Are there parallel situations in your own country, perhaps in your own community (e.g., the situation of spouse abuse and child abuse)? Is there anything you can do to help some person or group regain their shattered human dignity?

2. Reconciliation requires forgiveness and risk

Quote: [Following the destruction of his precious fig orchard by Jewish soldiers, Elias' father whispered] “Children, if someone hurts you, you can curse him. But this would be useless. Instead, you have to ask the Lord to bless the man who makes himself your enemy. And do you know what will happen? The Lord will bless you with inner peace — and perhaps your enemy will turn from his wickedness. If not, the Lord will deal with him.” (p. 62)

Questions: What do you think enabled Elias' father to be so forgiving? Do you think he was too forgiving? Are their situations in your own life where you could be more forgiving?

Quote: [reflecting on his foreign speaking engagements] “Standing before each crowd, I could only begin with the words that had long captivated me: 'Blessed are the peacemakers...' Not that I was simplistic; nor was I easy on them. I told them the way of a peacemaker was difficult — it required deep forgiveness, risking the friendship of your enemies, begging for peace on your knees and in the streets” (p. 200)

Questions: What makes the way of a peacemaker difficult and risky? What does it mean to “beg for peace on your knees and in the street”?

3. Reconciliation requires overcoming fear with love

Quote: [to his editor] “Can you help me to say that the persecution and stereotyping of Jews is as much an insult to God as the persecution of Palestinians? I wish to disarm my Jewish brother so he can read in my eyes the words, 'I love you.' I have beautiful dreams for Palestinian and Jewish children together.” (p. ix)

Questions: Is there any other truly effective way to “disarm” your opponents than love? Explain.

4. Reconciliation requires understanding

Quote: “My work in the community centers was all the more urgent if reconciliation was ever to come. In fact, I inaugurated each center by showing the film, THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, so that Palestinian young people could understand the horrors Jews had suffered under the Nazis and forgive. And it was a warning against turning to violence. Always there were tears, for the story could well have been that of many Palestinian girls as well.” (p. 207)

Questions: Why would a film about Anne Frank be so helpful? How could you become understanding of people you regard as enemies or strangers in your life?
5. Reconciliation requires resistance, but one coupled with a recognition of our spiritual connectedness with our "enemies"

Quotes: “We Gentiles had been ‘grafted in’ among God’s chosen people of faith, just as father had grafted six different kinds of fig trees together to make a delightful new tree... To me, as a Palestinian, Israel had returned to the land not in righteousness, but as my oppressor. As a Christian, I knew that I was grafted spiritually into the true family of Israel — though it certainly had not kept me or my people from suffering injustice. And how was I to respond? I could not join with the violent bands who were now attacking the country, even though I could feel their frustration. But neither could I live by the passive ways of father and the other elders.” (pp. 137, 142).

Questions: What does it mean to be “grafted spiritually into the true family of Israel”? With so much reason for bitterness, how could he feel spiritually connected? As a Christian, do you feel that same connection? As a Jew, do you feel spiritually connected to Christians? Why or why not?

6. Reconciliation means resisting the demon of violence as the real"enemy"

Quote: “I could not help but view the Zionists [Israeli nationalists] as victims, too — victims of something far worse than death camps... The Zionists were stricken with a disease of the spirit. It was as if some demon of violence had been loosed and it whispered cunningly, ‘Might is right. Achieve your own ends by whatever means necessary — all in the name of God.’ ... Peace can never be achieved by violence; violence begets more violence. For the first time I saw clearly the face of my true enemy and the enemy of all who are friends of God and of peace. It was not the Zionists, but the demon of Militarism.” (pp. 126-7)

Questions: Do you agree that the enemy is more “violence” or “Militarism” than it is other people? Do you think it is correct to call this a “demon”? Where do you see this “demon of violence/Militarism” active in our world, in your own community? How can we resist the power of such a “demon”?

7. Reconciliation requires surfacing the conflict and confronting the parties

Situation: four brothers in Elias’ congregation had not spoken to one another in years and could not even come together for their mothers’ funeral, and other hatreds poisoned the spirit of the community to such a degree that Elias felt he could no longer lead them in worship. At the end of worship the Sunday before Easter he chain locked the doors of the small church and addressed the congregation:

Quote: “For many months, I’ve tried to unite you. I’ve failed, because I’m only a man. But there is someone else who can bring you together in true unity. His name is Jesus Christ. He is the one who gives you power to forgive. So now I will be quiet and allow Him to give you that power. If you will not forgive, we will stay locked here. You can kill each other and I’ll provide your funerals gratis.” It took ten minutes before anyone spoke, but then the floodgates opened and apologizing and forgiving spread across the congregation for an hour! (pp. 170-1)

Questions: Why was his action successful? Are there situations you are aware of where you could act in a similar confronter/mediator way?

8. Reconciliation requires a closeness to God

Quote: [Elias quotes his father’s advice as he departed for boarding school]

“Learn all you can from the Bishop. If you become a true child of God, you will know how to reconcile enemies — how to turn hatred into peace. Only a true servant of God can do that.” (p. 75)

Questions: What does it mean to be a “true servant of God”? How does this help a person to reconcile enemies?
Mairead Corrigan Maguire

Mairead was born and continues to live in Northern Ireland. She was the aunt of the three Maguire children whose deaths, when they were struck by a gunman’s getaway car in 1976, led to the formation of the Community of the Peace People. Within weeks of its founding, more than a hundred thousand people, many of them women, had marched in rallies led by Mairead, Betty Williams, and Ciaran McKeown in Belfast, Derry, London, Dublin, and other places—all demanding an end to the violence in Northern Ireland. For this courageous nonviolent direct action, Mairead and Betty were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976. Prior to her work with the Peace People, Mairead was a secretary and a volunteer with a social service agency working with prisoners. In 1981, she was married to Jackie Maguire, widower of her sister Anne, who never recovered from the loss of her children and died in 1980. In addition to parenting five children, she travels around the world promoting reconciliation through nonviolence. While she has written no books, her letters and speeches have inspired millions. The following quotes are taken from a “Letter to America” and “A Letter to My Son Luke” (Luke is the youngest of their children, born in 1984).

1. Love and nonviolence are the only way to peace

“The ‘troubles’ now in their 18th year bring pain and suffering each day into new lives... The community remains deeply divided, as symbolized by the stone walls. We struggle under Emergency Laws, high unemployment and deepening poverty. Yes, there are many problems...

“Our hopes lie, too, in the sure knowledge that there is an incredible capacity for good in all human beings. But surely the greatest hope and wonder for us all is the capacity of all humans — and their greatest need — to love and to be loved. If men and women extended the deep compassionate love they have for their own family to the wider human family, a powerful force such as the world has never known would be released, thereby transforming our world as we now know it.” (Letter to America)

Questions: What are the sources of her hope? Are they “realistic”? What are the sources of your own hope for a better world?

2. Our country is the world; nationalism can be deadly

Quote: “With ever so gentle steps, walk step-by-step with all the travellers on this ‘thorny’ path of life. They will differ from you in color, creed (there are many paths to God), culture and politics — but above all, remember your fellow travellers have the same needs as you. Our common humanity is far more important than any religious or political ideologies. Treat every man and woman justly and gently as you would have them treat you.

Let no one plant in your heart the false seed of pride in any country’s flag, a seed that produces the flower of nationalism which grows so wildly, trampling and killing all life around it. Remember always, Luke, people are more important than countries.

I would not give one hair of your precious head for any country — you are more important than any country. And if I feel this passionate love for you and for my other children — Mark, Joanne, Marie Louise and John — I too feel passionately for the lives of the little children who are mine too, who today die of starvation in Ethiopia.... Remember, Luke, you have no country. The world is your country. You have not only 2 brothers and 2 sisters but millions of brothers and sisters.” (Letter to Luke)

Questions: How can patriotism be destructive? How can you develop a sense of common humanity with people around the world?

3. A commitment to nonviolence will lead to greater justice

Quote: “When human life is held as so sacred that no one can kill, then justice will reign in people’s hearts and in all lands. Wars will be no more. Justice will mean that no man or woman has too much, while some have nothing. Greed and selfishness will turn into feeding the hungry and removing all poverty. It is possible, Luke, to change to this kind of world, you just have to refuse to accept the old ways of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ things, and begin to ‘think’ and ‘act’ in a way more in tune with the magnificent goodness in every man and woman.” (Letter to Luke)

Questions: How can you develop a greater sense of the sacredness of human life? What do you think are the differences between the “old” and the “new” ways of thinking and doing that she refers to?

4. Reconciliation requires deep hope

Quote: “I want to tell you about the work of the Peace People and many others in Northern Ireland. We are a small movement now. We can’t do a lot, but we do what we can, as best we can. Our dream of peace for the Northern Irish people and the people of the world has not yet come true. We hold passionately to our belief that some day killing, injustice, torture, will be abolished from our world. Our prayer energizes us to work ceaselessly for that day.

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Quote: “It will not be easy for you to refuse to kill. Sadly we live in a world where those who refuse to kill and choose to live nonviolent lives are looked upon as naive or as cowards. Yes, it will take all of your courage to walk unarmed and to refuse to hate and kill, in a world which insists that you must have enemies and be prepared to kill them before they kill you.

Stand tall and strong, armed only with love, dear Luke, and refuse to hate, refuse to have enemies, refuse to let fear master your life. Only love can bring down the barriers of hate and enmity between people and nations. Hate and weapons only fuel the fear and bring closer the day of war. (Letter to Luke)

Questions: Do you agree? Why or why not? Give some examples where you can “refuse to hate, refuse to have enemies, refuse to let fear master your life”.

5. Reconciliation requires putting aside the past

Quote: “In Ireland, the time has come to shed our death culture and replace it with the celebration of life and the beautiful creation which we have been given in trust. Our songs too often glorify war and continue the old antagonism toward Britain. Each new generation is schooled in the sins and grievances of generations long dead. We live too much in the past, giving the old answers to the same old questions. Yesterday’s answers to Ireland’s problems are not the correct answers. How could they be when the problems have long since changed? It is time for the British and Irish people to walk together on the road of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is time, too, for Protestants and Catholics in the North to admit we have all hurt each other and forgive. Life is short, it passes like a breath. Why not be friends in the little time given to us? If only we knew one another, we could be each other’s best friend.” (Letter to America)

Questions: Is this really possible, for Northern Ireland, for other conflicts around the world? How can you put this into practice in your own life?

6. Our real enemies are militarism and poverty/greed

Quote: “The lessons of Ireland could be learned by other countries. Around the world the ‘death culture’ of militarism saps the creative energy of our youth. Instead of providing a sense of security, it leads people to live in fear.... Militarism is served today by men and women whose intelligence, energy and talents could change the face of the earth if used in the sciences of enhancing life, instead of the sciences of death and destruction. The money poured into militarism by most of the world governments, if diverted to home and overseas development projects, could abolish disease, hunger, homelessness and pollution, all of which are the ‘real enemies’ of the human family....” (Letter to America)

Questions: Do you agree? Why or why not? What keeps the governments from changing their policies? What keeps individuals from changing their thinking?

7. Real security requires dialogue and forgiveness

Quote: “Our security does not lie in more grotesque weapons for land, sea and air. Our security lies in building trusting relationships which lead to genuine reconciliation amongst the world’s people. Reconciliation is possible when we acknowledge that we have all hurt one another and ask for each other’s forgiveness. Our true security lies in dialogue that recognizes and accepts the uniqueness and originality of our different civilizations.” (Letter to America)

Questions: Do you agree? Why or why not? Where else could this be applied in our world today? Where could you apply it to your own life?

8. Reconciliation requires vulnerability and pain

Quote: ‘Like millions of people, we want a world without killing and violence. Our hearts tell us it should be this way, but our heads allow fear to decide and remind us of our vulnerability without weapons. We refuse to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, while all the time God asks us to be vulnerable and trust in God, not in our weapons.

“In truth, this is a difficult but necessary change that we have to make. It is true that the cost of stripping ourselves of the old ways and stepping onto the new path of nonviolence will not be without its pain. But take courage, friends, be strengthened in the knowledge that there are many of us travelling together and shaping out this part of our history in this new way. Above all, remember that all the while the Spirit is within the ‘little people’ all the time, leading them by the renewal of their hearts and minds.” (Letter to America)

Questions: Why is it so difficult for countries and individuals to be vulnerable? What can you do to practice or live this vulnerability?
Francis of Assisi

Francis lived 800 years ago in a town in Italy named Assisi. He was a rich, popular young man who loved to party. He was known as the "king of feasts" among his friends. He dreamed of doing brave things that would bring him honor and glory. He especially wanted to be a knight. Several times he volunteered to fight. However, after he experienced the hardships of jail as a prisoner of war, a long period of sickness, and months in mountain caves praying to know what God wanted of him in life, he became convinced that God wanted him to leave the army.

One of the answers to his prayers for direction in life came in the form of a man with leprosy that Francis met on the road one day. Francis had always run the other way whenever he came near a leper because of how horrible they looked and smelled to him. But this time it was different. He ran up and hugged the leper, even kissed him and offered him help. That was the beginning of his solidarity with the poor, his belief that all people are special to God, especially the poor.

As a peacemaker, Francis began to devote his life to turning enemies into friends — within his own family, his town, and around the world. At this time in history — about the year 1200 C.E. — there were a series of wars going on called "The Crusades". These were wars between Christians and Moslems (and sometimes Christians and Jews). Francis began to see how wrong it was to kill people for any reason, especially religion. So he decided one day to take a long dangerous trip to the head of one of the Moslem armies. We wanted to try to persuade the Sultan to stop the fighting. The Sultan laughed at Francis, but deep down admired his courage. Francis didn’t stop the Crusades. But his "Peace Prayer" (see below) touched the heart of the Sultan who said, "If all Christians were like you, there would be no war between us."

Francis was also a lover of the earth. In fact, he is patron saint for Christians of ecology. He never lost his love of party-ing. He would walk outdoors singing and dancing and enjoying every minute of God’s beautiful creation. He rebuilt churches that were falling apart. Even in his poor clothes and eating whatever food he could beg from others, Francis enjoyed life. He enjoyed God’s simple gifts — the sunrise and sunset, flowers, working in the fields, the birds and all the other animals. Here are some of Francis’ words to think about, plus some suggestions for how to put these words and example into practice in your own life, and a few resources for learning more Francis.

1. Work for reconciliation — Francis’ Peace Prayer

   "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; here there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

   O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

   — How would living this prayer improve our relationships? What can you do right now to make this prayer more a part of your own life?

2. Relate to the earth in personal terms

   Francis truly related to the earth in personal terms. As he proclaimed and lived:

   "We are sister and brother to animals and plants, water and soil, earth and sky."

   He spoke with and cared for animals as close friends. The popular movie about Francis is entitled "Brother Sun, Sister Moon." The words to the theme song paraphrase his "Canticle of Creation" (#5 below) You might learn and sing it:

   Brother sun, sister moon: I love to see you, love to sing your tune; so much in love with all that I survey.
   Brother wind, sister air: open my eyes to visions pure and fair, that I may see the glory around me.
   I am God’s creature, of God I’m a part; I feel God’s love awakening my heart.

   — would you feel strange speaking to the earth in personal terms? what do you think will happen if you do so? what would be good times and places to begin doing so? could you write a song to the sun at sunrise?

   — how could you be more caring for animals? for plants and natural features?
3. Call others to celebrate the earth

Francis loved to share the earth with others. Steve Van Matre cites the following story about Francis in his introduction to THE EARTH SPEAKS:

"There's a magical story about St. Francis enjoying the night air one evening in the village of Assisi. When the moon came up, it was huge and luminous, bathing the entire earth in radiance. Noticing that no one else was outside to enjoy this miracle, Francis ran to the bell tower and began ringing the bell enthusiastically. When the people rushed from their houses in alarm and saw Francis at the top of the tower, they called out asking him to explain what was wrong. Francis replied simply, "Lift up your eyes, my friends. Look at the moon!"

— What are some ways you can invite others to enjoy the beautiful gifts of creation? Who would be the first persons you would invite?

4. Praise the Creator for and through the beauty and gift of creation

Francis' "Canticle of All Creation" is one of the most celebrated hymns to God through creation.

"Most High, all powerful, all Good Lord! All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made, and first my Lord Brother Sun, who brings the day, and light you give us through him. How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars, in the heavens you have made them bright and precious and fair.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Wind and Air, fair and stormy, all the weather's moods, by which you cherish all that you have made.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten up the night. How beautiful he is, how gay, full of power and strength.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our Mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs..."

— after saying this prayer several times, make up your own hymn of praise to the Creator for the gift of creation.

5. Some action possibilities

— Find your own quiet place for thinking and praying, maybe just a corner in your home or a favorite spot in a park.

— Keep a journal where you write about your day and especially about the times when you said "yes" or "no" to what you thought was God's will for you.

— Become friends with people who aren't popular or beautiful or rich. There are all kinds of people in our community who are ignored or mistreated by others — some people in nursing homes, some people with disabilities, poor persons who go to food pantries or live in shelters. Sometimes even in our own families or school, there are people that are hard to like or who are ignored.

— Say Francis' "Peace Prayer" and choose one line at a time to try to live out more fully each day.

— Become an "ambassador of peace" — be willing to break up fights, stop others from teasing someone, say "I'm sorry" first, pray for someone we find hard to like, sometimes let others go first or get the biggest or best piece.

— Do something to build bridges between peoples of different countries, religions, races

— Enjoy and care for the earth every day (see all the examples in this unit)

— Take good care of pets.

— Take time for people as well as for enjoying nature and give surprises to friends that say how special you think they are.

— Grow a flower or vegetable garden.

— Take a treasure hunt or walk in nature and bring back natural God-given treasures.

Decision: Of all these possibilities, which one will you do first and why?
Desmond Tutu
South African Prophet for Peace and Interracial Reconciliation

Born October 7, 1931, in the Transvaal region of South Africa, Desmond Tutu taught high school for four years before resigning when the government instituted a state-administered system of inferior Bantu education for black students. He was ordained an Anglican priest in 1961 and bishop in 1976. That year when angry Soweto youths turned to violence, Tutu worked with other black activists to channel mob anger into peaceful demonstrations. In 1978, Tutu became secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches and became relentless in his challenge to the apartheid government in South Africa and in mobilizing international opposition. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, the same year he became the first black Anglican bishop of Johannesburg. As the confrontation has deepened, his two roles of moderate in the black community and prophet of peace to the whites have become more difficult to sustain. He remains committed to “a new kind of South Africa where we all, black and white, can walk tall together, black and white, into the glorious future which God is opening up before us.”

1. Black liberation will mean white liberation as well

Quote: “We are committed to black liberation, because thereby we are committed to white liberation. You will never be free until we blacks are free. So join the liberation struggle. Throw off your lethargy and the apathy of affluence. Work for a better South Africa for yourselves, ourselves, and for our children. Uproot all evil and oppression and injustice of which blacks are victims and you whites are beneficiaries, so that you won’t reap the whirlwind. Join the winning side. Oppression, injustice, exploitation— all these have lost, for God is on ‘our side’—on the side of justice, of peace, of reconciliation, of laughter and joy, of sharing and compassion and goodness and righteousness.” (CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, pp. 43-44)

Questions: Is it true for Tutu to say that “God is on our side”? Why or why not? In what senses could African Americans say this to white Americans? How are white Americans “beneficiaries” of oppression?

2. “Peace” often means clinging to privilege, not true reconciliation

Quote: “People are quite happy to talk about so-called peaceful means of change, as long as you canvass methods that everybody knows will be ineffectual; for basically, most whites want change as long as things remain the same, as long as they can go on enjoying their privileges and their high standard of living. That is why we urge the international community to exert as much political, diplomatic and economic pressure on South Africa as possible, to persuade us to get to the conference table. I love South Africa too passionately to want to see her destroyed, and international pressure may just avert that.” (pp. 53)

Questions: Do you think he is correct in his assessment of white South Africans? Could the same thing be said of white Americans? Why or why not?

3. Apartheid and reconciliation are totally contradictory

Quote: “Its [apartheid] claim that God created us human beings for separation, for apartness, and for division, contradicts the Bible.... God has created us for fellowship, for community, for friendship with God and with one another, so that we can live in harmony with the rest of creation as well.... The same gospel of Jesus Christ, which compels us to reject apartheid as totally unchristian, is the very gospel that constrains us to work for justice, for peace and reconciliation. God has given us a mandate to be ministers of God’s reconciliation.” (pp. 54-55)

Questions: What can you do to oppose apartheid in South Africa? What can you do to oppose “separation, apartness, division” in your own community and country? Do you think God has given us this same mandate?

5. Freedom, justice and reconciliation are God’s will and will ultimately triumph

Quote: “... Nothing could have been deeper than the despair of his followers when they saw their Master [Jesus] hanging on the Cross like a common criminal.... And then Easter happened. Jesus rose from the dead. The incredible, the unexpected happened. Life triumphed over death, light over darkness, love over hatred, good over evil. That is what Easter means — hope prevails over despair. Jesus reigns as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Oppression and injustice and suffering can’t be the end of the human story. Freedom and justice, peace and reconciliation, are God’s will for all of us, black and white, in this land and throughout the world. Easter says to us that despite everything to the contrary, God’s will will prevail, love will prevail over hate, justice over injustice and oppression, peace over exploitation and bitterness.” (pp. 82-83)

Questions: Does historical evidence support Tutu’s hope? How can he be so hopeful? How does his hope affect your own hope?