

Dear Colleagues and Friends.

This material is very much on my heart to give, so if you'd like me to talk to your local network of spiritual directors or those in Christian ministry of any kind, I'd be delighted to do so. It's best done in a day format or even longer. For this or any other response to the talk, please feel free to contact me on [juliedunstan57@icloud.com](mailto:juliedunstan57@icloud.com)

With every blessing,

*Julie*



## **STREAMS IN THE DESERT**

### **Prophetic Wisdom for Wilderness Times**

**Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.**

**I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?**

**I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.**

**What wilderness do you find yourself in tonight?**

**What streams do you long for?**

#### **EXILE AS CONTEXT**

Wilderness as a metaphor is both the place of exile and estrangement and the place of invitation and encounter.

Exile is not simply a geographical location, it is also a theological decision

Brueggemann

To locate ourselves in exile is to be all the nearer to those who are in geographical exile. It is to find the forms of faith that do not rely on institution or privilege or power. It is to find the heart and the longing and the vision for the sort of homecoming we ALL most need. JLD

*...And may we be visited so thoroughly,  
And met in wild places so overwhelmingly, that we are left undone. Ready  
for composting. Ready for the impossible.  
Welcome to the decade of the fugitive.*

**Bayo Akomolafe**

**In what way do you feel you or we are in exile? Not at home?**

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROPHETIC?**

Brueggemann writes: *The task of prophetic ministry, is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.*

The nature of that alternative consciousness is:

- Offers both challenge and hope
- Is a sort of soul sickness
- Is subversive of power
- Contains judgement and humility
- Calls us into covenant.
- Is in the Spirit of Christ

Prophets, as well as SD are on the edge of the inside.

But the alternative consciousness of the true prophet is never just a political agenda but a participation in the work of God, expressing both vision and humility and always for the greater purposes of Love. The

prophet calls us out, maybe, but even more-so IN: into a deep and abiding sense of God's life in all its fullness – for everyone! JLD

**How do you relate to the idea of being a prophet? Who are the people who inspire you in this way?**

### **LAMENT IN THE FACE OF DENIAL**

I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say  
“Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.” The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. Lamentations

Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,  
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,  
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,  
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;  
both the birds of the air and the animals  
have fled and are gone.

Jeremiah 9

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth.

How dare you!

Greta Thunberg

In his book ‘Hopeful Imagination’, he writes: *‘Nothing but grief could permit newness. It is the hurt brought to speech that moves God to newness. Where the grief is silent, the newness does not come and the old order*

*survives another season., But where the grief has its honest say, the news of God's newness is strangely visible. Brueggemann*

Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path. Brene Brown

And: you can choose comfort or you can choose courage but you can't choose both. Brene Brown

In his book *Prophetic Imagination*, B writes this:

*I have come to think that there is no more succinct summary of prophetic ministry than the statement of Jesus: Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. (Luke 6.21) or, more familiarly, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt 5.4).*

### **Implications for Spiritual Direction**

- Courageously face our own grief more fully.
- Encourage honest emotional expression in those we accompany - with us and also in prayer
- Resource with psalms and other stories of faith in hard times. Ask: what God story would hold you right now to this paradoxical journey of suffering and transformation.
- Check for serious trauma and wondering about further support

Tears release us from the prison of power and control and into the vast love and infinite possibility of God. Maggie Ross

What do you lament most deeply for yourself and for the world right now?  
What are the stories of our faith that best help you to grieve fully?

## **CONVERSION IN THE FACE OF BUSINESS AS USUAL**

Conversion is our entry point. It's one way that we nourish and nurture that alternative consciousness that is of God – both in ourselves in and in those we accompany. And not just merely to satisfy a religious expectation but to transform ourselves and the world. JLD

*The prophetic tradition has no ground on which to stand unless it can in some way attend to the holy ultimacy that lies beyond our canniest domestication. Brueggemann*

Our holiness is first of all and really only God's holiness, and that is why its certain and secure. It is a participation in love, a mutual indwelling, not an achievement or performance on our part... we do not need to be *correct*, but we can always try to remain *connected*. *Richard Rohr*

Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing. Ezekiel 47

I understand the Sabbath to be a quiet but uncompromising refusal to be defined by the production system of Babylon, so that life is regularly and with discipline enacted as a trusted gift and not as a frantic achievement. Brueggemann

### **Implications for Spiritual Direction**

- We must make a serious commitment to our own practices of sabbath, worship, humility, conversion, the holiness of God.
- We must protect the SD hour for God!
- Asking: where and how are you regularly taking off your shoes and standing on holy ground?

- Encouraging a ‘rule of life’

It is not enough, in fact it is meaningless, just to mouth the old forms of words and exhort ‘belief’ or even values or ‘bible-based’ behaviour. The need, he said, is for Christians capable of breaking ‘the spell of materialism and restoring the spirit of wisdom to the institutions of society’, and for this a much more radical conversion is required. Prayer then, as it was for Bonhoeffer, is understood to be at the heart of the church’s vocation.

Sarah Bachelard on Bonhoeffer

**Where and how are you regularly taking off your shoes and recognising holy ground? How might you immerse yourself more fully into the river of God’s love.**

### **PROPHETIC IMAGINATION in the face of Despair.**

The poetic imagination is the most subversive redemptive act that a leader of a faith community can undertake in the midst of exiles. The fresh alternatives offered through Isaiah liberated Jewish exiles to think differently, act differently, speak differently, and sing differently. In the end Babylonian definitions of reality lost their absoluteness and their authority because this poetry subverted them. Brueggemann

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,*

*the Creator of the ends of the earth.. Isaiah 40*

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone

of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

Martin Luther King Jr

Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. Brueggemann Prophetic Imagination

The specifically religious prophetic imagination is the wisdom, encouragement, challenge and continuity that we find when we describe and understand our experience in light of the great stories of God as narrated in our scriptures and experienced in our lives. JLD

... when the prophet returns, with the community, to those deep symbols, they will discern that hope is not a late, tacked-on hypothesis to serve a crisis but rather the primal dimension of every memory of this community. Prophetic Imagination

### **Implications for Spiritual Direction**

- Know and relish the faith story of people who come to you for accompaniment
- ‘Sing’ back with confidence and joy the resonances you hear from our shared faith stories.
- Value all creative expressions of prayer and spiritual direction: images, poetry, painting, song, dance

**You must give birth to your images.** They are the future waiting to be born. Fear not the strangeness you feel. The future must enter you long before it happens. Just wait for the birth, for the the hour of the new clarity.

Rilke



**What in your personal memory or the memory of our tradition kindles your hope most deeply in this wilderness time?**

### **EXAMEN**

**Of these three tasks of the prophetic, which are you most drawn to? In what way might this inform your work and your spiritual life in the future?**

Consider, then, what it means to be exiles awaiting and hoping for homecoming to the kingdom of God! In the Bible, the image of ‘kingdom of God’ is stitched together by narratives of miracle and wonder, whereby God does concrete acts of transformation that the world judges to be impossible. The ‘kingdom’ is a time and place and context in which God’s ‘impossibilities’ for life, joy, and wholeness are all made possible and available.

In the meantime, the waiting, hoping exiles are fixed upon these impossibilities. In so doing, the exiles refuse the world’s verdict on the impossibility, and, as a result, they pay less heed and allegiance to the world’s wearisome possibilities. Brueggemann

### **Blessing to Summon Rejoicing**

When your weeping  
has watered  
the earth.

When the storm  
has been long  
and the night  
and the season  
of your sorrowing.

When you have seemed  
an exile

from your life,  
lost in the far country,  
a long way from where  
your comfort lies.

When the sound  
of splintering  
and fracture  
haunts you.  
When despair  
attends you.  
When lack.  
When trouble.  
When fear.  
When pain.

When empty.  
When lonely.  
When too much  
of what depletes you  
and not enough  
of what restores  
and rests you.

Then let there be  
rejoicing.  
Then let there be  
dreaming.

Let there be  
laughter in your mouth

and on your tongue  
shouts of joy.  
Let the seeds  
soaked by tears  
turn to grain,  
to bread,  
to feasting.

Let there be  
coming home.  
—Jan Richardson