

Turn the page on your Mayan calendars; 2012 is here, and we are ready to go!

Prophecy has been in the news and will likely be a growing story as December 21st draws near. There will be many chuckles, and yet, when no one else is looking, we may cast our eyes heavenward – just in case.

Prophecy does that to us. On the one hand, we find it hard to take seriously. Harold Camping and others have issued so many “prophecies of doom” that didn’t pan out that it’s easy to believe that this is just another one; a good excuse to have a good time but nothing more. On the other hand, we’re aware that prophecy is more than mere human speech; just because there are many false prophets doesn’t mean that there can’t be a true one.

Remember Professor Trelawny, Harry Potter’s Professor of Divination at Hogwarts? For most of the series she is a first-class kook who responds to questions of her competence with, “I see you are in grave danger!” But on two occasions, she is overtaken by the spirit of prophecy. She speaks truth, and those who hear her speak know that what she has said is true.

So when someone claims to speak a prophetic word, we listen. We may grin and stifle a chuckle, but we listen, because you never know.

Our response is different if our crazy pastor says to us, “You are a prophet.” “Who me? What are you talking about? I can’t see the future! I’m no prophet! I’m just an ordinary Christian trying to make it through another day. I’m no prophet!”

To which your crazy pastor replies: You are a prophet. You are ready to go.

Consider this remarkable encounter between the Apostle Paul and these 12 disciples of John the Baptist. *Acts 19:5-7 (NRSV)* ⁵ *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* ⁶ *When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—* ⁷ *altogether there were about twelve of them.*¹

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We hear this and we think of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters dancing in the aisles, waving their hands, speaking in tongues and saying all sorts of things. We don't do that. We're Presbyterian. God's frozen chosen. We're rational, reasonable, and responsible. We don't dance in the aisles!

So we dismiss this text. That was then. This is now. They were special. They were extraordinary; we're ordinary. Good for them but this has little to do with us.

Ah, but we were also “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Apostolic hands were laid on us; this is why only an ordained minister can baptize in our tradition. And God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit; God's powerful presence abides in you and in me. And Jesus promised us: *John 15:5 (NRSV) I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.*²

Does this mean we should start waving our hands and dancing in the aisles? No, it does mean that we have work to do. It means that our baptism in Jesus' name is more than simply a cute moment in worship; our baptism is more than a cleansing from sin that assures us of eternal life; our baptismal certificate is more than sanctified fire insurance.

Our baptism is a great commission. You are ready to go. You have all that you need to do what God is calling you to do. Go and bear fruit!

Do you need guidance? Ask for it. God will give it. Do you need a word; a word that comforts, a word that sustains; do you need the right word for the right time and do you need to say it the right way? Ask for it. God will give it to you.

Perhaps the word will be something grand and great, but more and more, I hear God whispering small words, humble words to us and through us. Words that are just our size. The kinds of loving words a Father might say to his infant child.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The gift of prophecy is the gift of that humble, small, life-giving, life-changing word. A prophet does not foretell the future; a prophet forth tells; she speaks about today from the perspective of God’s love. She tells the truth when we’ve gotten lost in the lies. Sometimes, the truth hurts, and the prophet bears that pain with us. Love never leaves us alone; it gives us space when we need it; but it never leaves us alone.

For instance, a member of our church dropped by this week to pick up her envelopes (which can be found in the church office), and we had a lovely chat. She recalled how she came to Pennside. They had moved into Reiffton; they were looking for a Presbyterian church. A member of Pennside said to them, “You should come to Pennside.”

That was over 50 years ago. That was prophecy. That was the word of God being spoken into that person’s life. “You should come to Pennside.”

Now, did the person who said that suddenly speak in a strange voice with their eyes rolling around in their heads? Did they start waving their hands and dance in the aisle? No. They simply spoke. When the opportunity came, they were ready to go.

What brought you to Pennside? What difference has being a part of this faith community made in your life? How did you hear the word?

Now, listen to the people you come in contact with; when you’re getting your hair done, at the grocery store, at school, at work. Ordinary people just like you trying to get through today. Listen to them and ask God every day to guide you so that when the opportunity comes to say the right word the right way at the right time, you’ll say it. You’ll be a prophet.

I don’t think 2012 will be the end of the world, but it will be a year that changes lives forever. Changing lives will change our community. God only knows what the ripple effect will be, and that’s the promise and the possibility – God knows! God has a plan and we are a part of it!

In 2012, remember that you are baptized! Your baptism commissions you to serve according to God’s plan. You are a prophet; God will speak through you!

“READY TO GO!”

The power of the Holy Spirit gives you all that you need to do what God is calling you to do. Go and bear fruit! You are sent to serve.

In the year of our Lord 2012, the community of baptized disciples that is Pennside Presbyterian Church is going to change lives and change our community. The challenge of this time and place is great, and you are up to the challenge! You are baptized. You are ready to go! Amen.