

Prophecy Sermon : St Augustine's Church

12th March 2006

Introduction - the pentagon

<PowerPoint slide 1 - The pentagon – five fold ministries>

Last week Jonathan introduced us to the next 'life-shape' we shall be considering from the book The passionate Church

The pentagon happens to be the appropriate five-sided shape which helps us remember the five-fold ministry outlined by Paul in Eph 4 –

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¹¹It was he who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors** and **teachers**, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

These words are **key** to providing a template for the healthy working-Church. In this description we see how Christians with different ministry gifts work together for the **good** of the *whole* Church body; here there are five to be in leadership alongside each other : **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.....**

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Now I think it's safe to say that the ministry of 'Pastor', and the word itself sits fairly comfortably with us.....in the Anglican church, we are used to someone who cares for us, who PASTORS us.....

I daresay too that the idea of a teacher is also OK – we have teachers in Sunday School, and much of the material which is presented in sermons is of a 'teaching' nature – there's stuff for our head to understand as well as our heart embrace...

But what about these other 3?

Like many of you I was born and bred in the Anglican church (being the daughter of a parish priest) and I can honestly say that the possibility of a ministry called the *prophetic* or someone who might call themselves '*an apostle*' was not only way out of my experience but would have been labelled as **weird** and definitely from one of the **other** branches of the Christian Faith, even a sect maybe or something worse. And an evangelist was definitely someone who visited our town once a year, erected a huge marquee on a sports field and thumped a big black bible while shouting down a microphone that '*all need to be saved*'!! and "*ye must be born again*" and "*are you washed in the blood?*"

So, what were we worried about? Why, for many of us Anglicans is there so much fear surrounding these ministries, even these words? Is it fear of the unknown perhaps? or Is it fear that its not very 'Anglican', not 'traditional'? Something for which we don't train our ordinands at theological college? Is there maybe a feeling of a 'them' and 'us' scenario?

Those who were here last week might recall Jonathan's saying '*you don't need to be ordained to be called to one of these ministries.....*' No, indeed, you do not!

And yet, the Bible tells us that, in the church, God calls some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some teachers, pastors and evangelists.....so, if, out of fear, or lack of experience in this area, or not recognising our own calling or whatever is the reason – IF we are **not** exercising this 5-fold ministry, what are we missing out on? And, conversely, just suppose that we did get 'brave' enough to embrace all that such a leadership would mean, what might it look like? What might be the result for us here at St Augustine's?

What then is the fruit of this intertwined ministry when it is properly exercised?

Well, we would see a **mature** Church body, built up in **unity in the faith** and in knowledge of Christ, and attaining the fullness of Christ. That's what Paul says. *A faithful bride, readied and spotless for her King.*

This, I believe, is not only a *worthy* goal; it is **VITAL** if we are to grow and mature and become all that God intends for His part of the Body here in this part of Calgary.

Now, you might, at this point, ask perfectly valid questions about the other gifts that Paul mentions elsewhere, like in 1 Cor 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, etc

Yes, we do need to make room for them – these are *all* part of **kingdom body-building**, and many have been discussed in past sermons - perhaps you'd like to check out the church website and click on 'sermons' – you'll find a bunch when we studied 1 Corinthians back in 2004?

Ephesians 4 speaks to **all** the churches – outlining foundational teaching as to how churches should function.....

Today then, we are going to introduce to you the ministry of **Prophecy**; certainly something I was never trained in at theological college - and I bet Jonathan wasn't either! – and certainly not a ministry to which I feel called, but Pete my husband is, and its he that's put in the vast majority of work on the rest of this sermon.

Introduction – prophecy

Perhaps the best place to start is to consider –

What it is NOT

To move in the prophetic, you do not have to look like this:

slide 4 – *OT Prophet*>

No, in fact something like this will do fine:

slide 5 – *Normal people*>

Living in one of these places is optional:

slide 6 – *Hermits cave*>

This will work just as well:

slide 7 – *Ordinary Houses*>

You can eat locusts and wild honey:

slide 8 – *Locusts*>

If you want to. But you don't have to.

slide 9 – *Tim Horton's*>

Many people think that prophets are all about foretelling the future...

slide 10 – *Crystal ball*>

But then again, 'many people' can be wrong.... Funnily enough, it's all about this:

slide 11 – *Cross*>

So, What is prophecy?

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IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HAVE A WHOLE WEEKENED to talk about the OT prophets and their roles within Israel's history, and to discuss in detail the prophets, male and female in the NT, but sadly we don't have time for that....but so that we can get a bit used to it lets consider the words of Graham Cooke (a guy from the UK who has exercised this ministry for many years):

*“Prophecy is a gift of the **Holy Spirit**. It does not belong to people. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to people at **His own discretion**. All Christians can prophesy, however that does not make everyone who does so a prophet.”*

Prophecy, at its heart is **not** about predicting the future, or having knowledge of hidden matters. That may play a part, but it is not the **essence** of prophecy. **No, prophecy at its heart is about holiness**, about proclaiming the **burning heart of the love of God** and earnestly seeking to prepare the Church, the bride of Christ, for His 2nd Coming. The goal of prophecy, much as for other gifts, it to **build up**. Every prophecy should have this at its heart, regardless of who it is for or what form it might take.

Types of prophecy

What forms does prophecy take? It's not really possible to put a limit on the ways that God can speak to us. However, here are some of the common ones:

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- Through a **vision**. A good example of this can be seen in this story: <Pg 54 – Story>.
- Through a **dream** – for example **Joseph's dream where he was instructed to flee to Egypt with Mary and the young Jesus.**
- Through a **written word** – it might be **explicit**, or simply a strong sense of what the Lord is saying, requiring **the prophet** to find the words to match what was given by God.
- Through prophetically inspired pictures or,
- Even through the medium of music.

We cannot and should not limit God to specific ways of communication. However we are admonished to test *all* spirits, to see if they are from Him or not. For as soon as **true** prophecy is given, it seems satan will attempt to infiltrate with counterfeit versions.

Which brings us on to our next consideration....

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How do we discern prophecy?

How should we discern prophetic words? How do we know if it really IS from God? This is a complex subject that we don't have time to *fully* explore now, however there are some **key** considerations whenever a prophetic word is received.

1. Firstly, and most importantly - **how do we know if it is indeed from God** and not just some made-up thoughts in a person's head? This can be a cause of much anxiety. **What if one gives a word and then find out it's not from the Lord?** Or does one run the risk of **not giving the word and so being disobedient because it *was* from Him?** This takes much prayer and practice, a right heart before Him and mature Christians who can help the discernment process..... and the **key** test is :
 - **Does it conform to the Bible? Does it agree with scripture?**
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 - Does it **build up** (whether inspirational or correctional?)
 - Conversely, is it **manipulative, controlling or negative?**
 - What is the spirit behind the prophecy? Is it of the Lord, of human making, or of the devil? *False* prophecy is deceptive, whereas *poor* prophecy is simply impure or weak. One is inspired by the Father of Lies, while the *other* may well come from an immature Christian or possibly one who has unresolved issues in their lives.
- 2.

3...If we discern such a prophecy is from the Lord, we then need to understand whether it is inspirational or correctional? The former type, an **inspirational** word, can't really do much harm, **for example it's hard to cause upset to a Church by seeking to encourage people through prophecy.** However, the more correctional prophecy, if handled *incorrectly*, has the potential to cause much damage. **This type of prophecy should always be submitted to the rest of the leadership of the Church for further discernment.** If nothing else, it a matter of common courtesy! >>>>.story

4....Having understood these things, we then need to examine such questions as

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- ✓ What is its purpose?
- ✓ **Who** is it for?
- ✓ **When** is it for?

And these are some of the issues with which the **prophetic listening group** in this church have been grappling since they first got together 3-4 months ago– the Lord has *clearly* given a number of prophetic words over the past couple of years, but **when** to give them out and **how** and to **whom** has not been so clear! This group, by the way, is made up of about 8 people to whom God gives words in various ways – through **dreams, visions, pictures, direct prophecies** etc.....its not a closed group, by any means, and is a work in progress. I believe there are also others in our parish to whom God speaks in similar ways, and we'd love to hear from you as well.....

So, following these guidelines makes it harder to go 'off track' in any major kind of way.

Having said all this, we need to keep in mind 1 Corinthians 13 v 9 which says: *For we know in part and we prophesy in part.* . We do not see the **whole** picture; we are only given what the Lord reveals for any one time. **In that way prophesy is very different from, say, divination. Divination seeks to know all about the future for power and control, and is NOT of the Lord. In as much as the prophetic **knows about the future, it is to build up the Church.****

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So What is it like to prophesy?

(Pete)

So, what is it like to prophesy? As with all these things, experiences may vary, but there are some common denominators. Jeremiah 20 v9 says this: *But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."* There is a sometimes a prophetic imperative that cannot be ignored until the word has been given. It simply has to be given -out of obedience! It has been described in a more contemporary fashion as this:

*Yet, the white wild fire burns.
One moment, a candle shrouded,
Next the heart of heaven itself; burning within, wild, free, untameable.*

That is of course not to say that the prophetic should somehow be wild and disordered to be genuine. The bible says this in 1 Corinthians 14 **slide 17**

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. [which means that the prophetic word is under the control of the person giving it – to release or not release it] ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

The prophetic has often been compared to a burden, one that does not go away until the prophecy has been delivered (and sometimes not even then).

This is not the case for every prophetic experience though; many of them may be milder in character, perhaps just a quick vision or insight that goes nowhere unless prayed into. Or perhaps an inner prompting to draw a picture representing something the Lord is saying to the Church.

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The important thing to realise is that this is not magic, or something weird outside normal Christian experience. All Christians have the gift of prophecy open to them, if not an ongoing ministry. The reason we often do not travel this path is that we are scared, have little faith, are worried that we will make a mistake, or that it's just something 'not done' in the Church – especially the Anglican church!!.

Prophets are not magicians, nor do they have a monopoly on divine revelation. All Christians should be open to listening and receiving from God, and He delights when His children still themselves in His presence.

Different levels of prophecy

We should also understand that there are different levels of prophetic ministry (and this particular interpretation has been described by Graham Cook)

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1. The gift of prophecy is a bit like the shallow end of the pool, where all can safely use it, and you don't really need to be able to swim, although it helps if you like water and don't mind getting your face wet! It is often characterised by an *occasional* and specific use in a particular situation. It is a nondirective inspirational form of prophecy that is used to bless people and glorify the Lord.

This is what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 14 v1-5:

¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ² For those who speak in a tongue ^[a] do not speak to other people but to

God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ Those who speak in a tongue edify themselves, but those who prophesy edify the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, ^[b] but I would rather have you prophesy.

2. Prophetic ministry is characterised by an *increase in anointing*, and where a consistent proven use of the prophetic gifting is displayed. People moving in prophetic **ministry** are pushing into the deeper end of the pool and may receive more specific revelatory words. They need to be a little more confident in the water and able to swim. At this stage it is important that **they are held accountable**, both in character and words given. Which is not to imply that some kind of *critical straightjacket* should be applied; the person must be free to make mistakes. Rather anybody moving in **prophetic ministry** must be under **authority from the leadership**, both for their good and that of the Church.

3. The **Office of Prophet** is taking the ministry into the deep end. And here you really do need to be a strong swimmer – no good floundering around hoping for a flotation device to keep you safe.....Those to whom God has given **Office of Prophet** typically will have wider impact, speaking to churches, cities, regions, even nations and governments. The *heart* of the prophet here is all for **holiness and purity** and seeking to prepare the bride of Christ. There is a pronounced end-time theme and a deep kingdom perspective. Words given may often be accompanied by signs and wonders (which again, brings in other gifts of the Spirit.) The prophet will invest the church with supernatural faith, **forthtelling** the word of God and **foretelling** his purposes.

Unsurprisingly this requires significant training and development over a long time! A bit, I imagine, like training to be a Life-guard....The development is particularly on the character. *Humility* is a prerequisite for the prophet; *spiritual pride* and arrogance is his or her nemesis. **The prophet is never more effective than when they have died to self, having a heart only for things of God, and a great sensitivity and compassion for God's Church.**

In the OT, very basically, the role of the prophet was to call or recall people to a right relationship with God. In the NT and today, that has not changed.

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The five fold ministry

So how does this tie together with other ministries – apostle, pastor, teacher, evangelist? Ideally, as seamlessly as possible!

One of the partnerships that is *not* always entirely *seamless* is between prophet and pastor. (*And by 'pastor' here, I don't necessarily mean the church rector – I mean those who are called to the **Ministry of Pastor-** to pastoral work) In some senses their hearts' inclinations are opposed to each other, and this can cause conflict if roles are not properly understood. Prophecy can by it's very nature be *attacking, stimulating and provoking*.*

Prophets have a way of **ploughing up the ground** and causing disturbance. Sometimes this is sorely needed. Pastors, when encountering hard ground, have a tendency **to lay a patio!** **Prophets challenge, pastors soothe.** But both are needed, and when this is understood a great but paradoxical partnership can be formed.

The next partnership to consider is between the **prophetic and teaching** ministries. To generalise, **teaching imparts Gods principles** while **prophecy imparts Gods purposes.** For the most part, one speaks to the **head**, the other to the **heart** (though there can be overlap) And, as before, both are required. Some sermons, for example, contain ‘*prophetic teaching*’, challenging both head and heart.....

The **prophet and evangelist** also work well together. Consider 1 Corinthians 14 v24-25: **slide 21**

²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, ²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

So the prophetic is seen as an essential component within evangelism. There is even a school of thought which teaches **prophetic evangelism** – when a prophetic word is given to **one** which reveals some truth regarding another (non-Christian) in order to make them aware of God’s interest in their life (to read up moré on this subject see Mark Stibbe’s book ‘*Prophetic Evangelism*’)

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The last partnership to be considered is between **apostles and prophets**. In some ways this is the most obvious partnership. **The prophet speaks God’s vision**, and the **apostle is enabled to realise that vision.**

Consider Ephesians 2 v19-22: **slide 23** *¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

People with prophetic giftings often work best in teams. Hence the getting-together of those from within this congregation who are aware that God speaks to them in these ways (words, dreams, visions etc) This is to provide the **accountability** mentioned earlier, and an understanding of the particular trials and temptations of those exercising this gift. Additionally, there is a sense of **iron-sharpening-iron** when prophetic people gather together.

The prophetic always works best as a thread intertwined within other ministries. When at a conference in the Shetlands last summer, we were *very* aware how prayer, discernment, prophecy, worship and intercession flowed through, around and within each other. When things work/flow that well, it’s hard to give the different gifts particular names, or even to realise sometimes when one has stopped and another continued , and they simply flow as one in the body of Christ.

Conclusion – Application to St Augustines

So, how does all this apply to St Augustines?

Well, the traditional Anglican Church model in the past has been a little like this: **Slide 24**

This worked just fine in the 19th century when the Church was in maintenance mode. However it does not translate well into the 21st century when we have a **mission field** before us. This model puts the entire onus on one or maybe a few individuals, (if there's a team of clergy!) and reinforces a **consumerist type culture** within the Church. As a result any real and lasting Church growth is impeded.

This type of model is also **not** a *biblical* model. A biblical model based on Ephesians 4 looks a little more like this: **Slide 25**

In this type of church, ministry is **exercised by all** for the good of the Church body. The onus is not on **one** sole leader to work in areas of ministry that they may not be called to exercise. **Believe it or not, even Jonathan, with all his gifting, isn't called to be all 5 – apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, teacher.....!**

The church is better balanced, more mature and far more able to reach into the mission field when we recognise and embrace the truth that we are **all called by Jesus** in His great commission.....there's no such thing as unemployment in the Kingdom of God! The pay isn't always brilliant, but boy, the rewards are out of this world!!

And every single person sitting here today, every one who loves the Lord, has a ministry, some gifting, a calling on your life, from God

Now it may not be one of these particular 5 – it might be something else, one of the other gifts given by the Spirit, **But you know, it might just be too.....**the leadership in this church is not complete, not functioning biblically, not as we should be, until this 5-fold ministry is in place. So, **come on – where are you?** If Jonathan doesn't have all the gifts, and **I certainly don't**, then there must be folk in this congregation, in this parish, and maybe quite A FEW of you who are called into one of these areas.....please use this season of Lent to pray about it, to enquire of the Lord; to ask Him **“where and how would you have me serve, Lord ?”**