

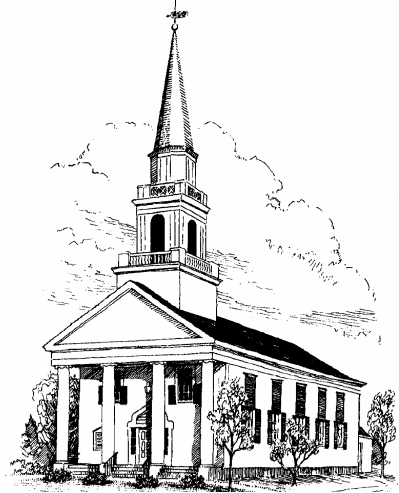
Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from February 28, 2010

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg
“Killing Prophets”

Scriptures:
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35



Apparently, some of us have been doing it all wrong. Some of us have been guiding, coaching, and nurturing our children in the wrong direction. In fact, because of that, we may be partly responsible for our high unemployment rate and the reason it's going to stay there into the foreseeable future.

Now, admittedly, I tuned in to the National Public Radio broadcast on Monday afternoon somewhere in the middle, but soon enough to hear the author of a new book on our tough economic times and the talk-show host and several phone-in callers discuss the current state of the U.S. job market, the profile of the unemployed and the prospects for our country's getting folks back to work and lowering our 10% unemployment rate to something more manageable.

We all know this is a very complex problem and there is no one single reason for it nor one solution; however, I did not realize that an entire generation of parents, at least in part, were to blame. Apparently, what we did wrong was to tell our children that they could be whatever they wanted to be when they grew up. Some of us actually encouraged our children to be musicians, or artists or writers.

Regrettably, it was bad advice given today's job market. I cringe to think what this panel would have said about those of us encouraging our children to go into ministry, or to work for God's church in some way. My guess is that *they* would cringe at hearing our advice to follow your heart or to listen for God's call.

Now, of course, it is essential for our young people to be educated, trained, prepared in practical skills to make their way in the world; but, I'm afraid the opinions I heard on the radio this week may have excluded dreaming and, if carried too far, might also tend to squash the development of prophetic voices in our midst: the ones who question the status quo, who rebel against the establishment, who move to a different drumbeat, who have a vision of a different world.

We've got a voice-squashing attempt in our scripture this morning. Jesus is going through one town and village after another teaching as he makes his way to Jerusalem. In the verse right before our passage begins, Jesus has *just* mentioned to the gathered crowd that

“Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” We read, “At that *very hour*, some Pharisees come to him and tell him to get out of town. “Get away from here for Herod wants to kill you.”

Jesus replies: Go tell that fox for me, I’m working here! We can almost imagine his whipping out his calendar, maybe a Blackberry: Sorry, no can do. Casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I finish my work. Get moving, you say? Hurry up and get out of *here* and get to Jerusalem? Oh yeah, thanks for the tip.

Just a little reminder here on the power structure at that time. This Herod is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great whom we encountered in the story of Jesus’ birth. Herod Antipas is neither respected by his bosses in Rome nor the locals. One commentator refers to his “pathetic little power” and his “feeble little threats.” The big guns are in Jerusalem, where Pilate sits as governor. So Jesus’ initial reply to the Pharisees is full of bitter irony—Yeah, I’m going to run away from *here* because *Herod* wants to kill me and head right into Jerusalem ... where Jesus is well aware of what awaits him.

But at the thought of Jerusalem his tone softens to lament: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”

The city that kills the prophets. So the good, practical advice then is to keep your head down. Don’t make noise. Don’t call attention to what we’re doing wrong. Don’t point out the failures in our system, how we’ve strayed from the vision. Whew, above all, don’t take risks. Play it safe. Plan your life around self-sufficiency, monetary success and financial security.

Jesus spoke of a new kingdom, a different power structure, a tipped upside-down paradigm. And, sisters and brothers, I fervently hope we are teaching our children the same. Yes, to be educated in practical, useful ways, but also to dream and to dream big. To have faith that indeed, all things are possible with God. To imagine writing a symphony, or painting a masterpiece, or sailing around the world, just as well as curing cancer or discovering new sources of renewable energy.

It is up to us to cultivate in our young people a vision of a better world, whether it be through the sciences or the arts or business or ministry in God’s church, to encourage them to imagine that *they* could lead God’s people closer to the realm of God. That *they* could broker peace. That *they* could heal our nations and our planet.

And the one who goes before them *and* us is the perfect parent, the one who longs to gather us up like a mother hen, the one who is much better than any of us at combining encouragement with accountability. Author Timothy Shapiro writes: “[Jesus is] the mother hen who will pursue her child through thick and thin, through good school days and bad, through stupid moves and violent outbursts; he’s the mother hen who folds the covers down on the bed and puffs up the pillow, at the same time saying, ‘Don’t let me catch you doing that again.’”

Barbara Brown Taylor says this about our mother hen: “Having loved her own who

were in the world, she loved them to the end. She died a mother hen, and afterwards she came back to them with teeth marks on her body to make sure they got the point: that the power of foxes could not kill her love for them, nor could it steal them away from her. They might have to go through what she went through in order to get past the foxes, but she would be waiting for them on the other side, with love stronger than death.”

On this Church Vocations Sunday, as we recognize and celebrate Jackie’s listening for God’s call, as we celebrate the gift and responsibility of children in our midst, may we work together to do more than just prepare our young people for the job market. May we inspire them with the life and teachings of Jesus. May we instill in them indignation at the oppression that still exists in our systems and cities. And may we continue to encourage them to follow their hearts, to listen for God’s call in their individual, unique little souls. Amen.

