

Stories of the Hebrew Bible

Lesson 11: Prophets and Prophetic Imagination

5.09.2021

Objectives: Exploring prophetic imagination and prophets, using the prophet Jeremiah as an example.

Materials: Login to RE YouTube account, teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

Time allotments: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Zoom Icebreaker: Guess the Rhythm (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone)

One youth leads and changes the rhythm. The group mimics the changing rhythm while another youth tries to guess who the leader is.

Teachers, pick one youth to be the “guesser” and ask them to turn around. Quietly, select a different youth to be the “leader” by writing their name on a piece of paper and showing it to the group. The “leader” can clap, snap, make sounds, etc. to start and change the rhythm. Once the rhythm starts, invite the “guesser” to turn back around. The “guesser” gets three tries to identify the leader. Hands should be visible and sound audible so that everyone can follow along and participate. If someone does not have working video, they can be the guesser. Repeat as time allows.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from scholar and theologian, Walter Brueggemann)

“The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that make it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Prophets and Prophetic Imagination (15 minutes)

Copy and paste the second UU source and the four definitions of prophets (below) into the chat so youth can refer to them in discussion.

Teacher says: Our second UU Source from which our faith tradition draws inspiration and wisdom is: *Words and deeds of prophetic women, men, and people that challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.* Consider four definitions of prophets from the dictionary.

- a) One who utters divinely inspired revelations.
- b) One gifted with more than ordinary spiritual or moral insight.
- c) One who foretells future events.
- d) One who speaks truth to people in power.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does revelation mean?
(Hint: realizing a surprising or unknown truth, often in a dramatic, life-altering, or profound way.)
- What does moral insight mean?
(Hint: it’s complex! It involves exploring possible solutions from multiple perspectives beyond what appears to be the limitations or problem. What could I/we do? is a question that can lead to moral insight.)

- What if we interpret “foretelling future events” as imagining or envisioning a future that does not yet exist? What does visionary mean?

(Hint: having an idea of how the world ought to be and daring to ask “What if?”)

- What does speaking truth to power mean?

(Hint: exposing and sharing a truth to people and structures of power for the purpose of making the truth a reality. For example, “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal” or all people have inherent worth and dignity is a truth that is not yet a reality. Movements like BLM and MeToo seek to speak truth to power.)

- What definition/s do you think best describes a “prophet”?

Teachers: re-read, and post in the chat, Walter Brueggemann’s opening quote:

“The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that make it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”

- What about this quote stands out to you?
- How do you practice imagination?

6. Jeremiah (15 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: There are many prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,) and the Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). Today, we are going to learn about the Prophet Jeremiah, one of the Latter Prophets.

In the Book of Jeremiah, Israel has broken covenant with God by way of worshiping false idols (think back to Moses and the Golden Calf) and allowing rampant social injustice due to corrupt leadership—royalty and priests more interested in protecting their political power than taking care of their people. God calls on Jeremiah to help Israel restore their covenant with God. Jeremiah re-asserts Moses’s prediction that God will not abandon God’s people; rather, renew God’s covenant with the Israelites by changing their hearts, so that the Israelites can in turn renew their covenant with God. Throughout the Book of Jeremiah there is plenty of destruction, violence, and conflict. Jeremiah continues to try and expose injustice within Israel and among invading nations, like Babylon, by speaking truth to power. He gets kidnapped and punished, but in the end, wins the favor of the

King of Babylon, providing hope for the future of Israel. For our purposes, we are going to take a closer look at how Jeremiah is called to be prophetic.

Screen share lesson attachment 11a (1 Jeremiah).

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.
- Then, zoom-in on the two images, (1) The Holy Prophet Jeremiah and (2) The Clay.
 - What do these images make you wonder about, curious about?
 - Does Jeremiah look like a prophet in the icon? In the painting?
 - What makes someone look like a prophet? (e.g. *body position, age, adornment, direction of gaze.*)

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you think God means by “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’”? How do you think youth can be prophetic?
- What does it make you think when God says...

“today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant” ..?

Do you think some things need to be destroyed or ended before other things can grow or get better? Can destruction and building happen at the same time?

- Why does God ask Jeremiah what he “sees”? What kind of seeing do you think God means?

(Hint: think back to “moral insight” and “being visionary.”)

- Why is God asking Jeremiah to go “against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land”?

(Hint: who are the people in power? Might God be asking Jeremiah to speak truth to power?)

- What makes Jeremiah a prophet?
- What do you think gives Jeremiah courage to speak truth to power?

7. Dorothy Day (20 minutes):

Teacher summarizes: In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, prophetic women, men, people are not confined to a single religious tradition. In fact, they are not confined to religion at all. Wherever people from any walk of life—secular, religious, political, musical, educational—**speak truth to those in power** and challenge us to stand up to evil and expand justice, peace, and love, we seek their wisdom. We are concerned not only

with the *founders* of the faith but deeply concerned with those who *carry visionary work forward* in any generation, including ourselves. Ours is a way of unfolding revelation, or of never-ending revelation, where every generation and every person can be a prophet and hero.

Screen share (with audio) <https://youtu.be/rE-LmBC6QOQ?list=PLYmrkQqDJmKBUvD-BBdil6ZqDgXVxFPjj&t=1653> (automatically starts at 27:25, play until “amen” at 37:00).

Questions for Discussion:

- What makes Dorothy Day’s words and actions prophetic?
- Who are other people you consider prophetic? Why?
(e.g. Moses, Esther, Malala Yousafzai, William Barber, Malcolm X, Sylvia Rivera, Greta Thunberg, Katherine Johnson, Angela Davis.)
- What movements do you consider prophetic?
(e.g. BLM, MeToo, Never Again (gun control movement), climate justice, Poor People’s Campaign.)
- Is there a prophetic insight or voice that speaks to you? And if so, how do you hope to honor that insight?

8. Announcement: Next week is our closing celebration. Thanks for being with us this semester.

9. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

10. Leave zoom breakout classroom: wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”