

# Small Signs of Hope by Kate Cudlipp



**PROPHETIC HOPE**

*Angel and Prophet*

*Alek Rapoport*

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## LIKE A THOUSAND RED BIRDS

Phil Porter

We clutch our tiny bits of faith in tight fists,  
shoved firmly into our pockets.

We clutch it suspiciously, so unwilling to let it go –  
we don't want to lose it.

We clutch it fearing that once it is spent,  
we will be without hope,  
cast adrift, out of luck.

Help us loosen our grip.

Help us to pull our hands out of our pockets.

Help us to uncurl fingers stiffened over time,

to grow,

to shimmer,

to pulse,

to explode into the air

like a thousand red birds.

Like many of you, I get daily messages like this one from the Church of the Saviour listserv, inward/outward. I also get offerings from Sojourners' Verse and Voice service and occasional earth/Spirit morsels from a woman who was part of Seekers for a couple of years and who, after she left, has continued to send her Ecomponents to those of us who asked to receive them.

Does getting these messages make me a "spiritual junkie"? I don't know, but I can say that taking a break to read one of them as I work at my computer is often a moment of grace, a reminder of Life—with a capital "L"—beyond the task at hand.

In the context of "Prophetic Hope" as our theme for this liturgical season, I can't help but wonder if these electronic messages coming at random moments during the day aren't, in the words of our opening reflection paragraph, part of the "hope-filled language of prophecy," the "language of amazement" that stands against despair.

I find plenty of reasons to despair these days and would love to see some dazzling, believable message that promises, "All will be well!" In looking for such an assurance, however, I'm finding I can be blind to the small, surprising signs of

prophetic hope all around.

I'm beginning to believe that modern technology can convey God's message of repentance and hope just as the voices of the prophets did in biblical times. And, just as in biblical times, we humans can choose to listen for the true Word or we can let that Word be drowned out by the cacophony of the world around us and our own "monkey-mind" thoughts.

[My word this morning will be "interrupted" by a few of the messages I have received electronically over the past several months. I invite you to judge if these "interruptions" have a quality of God's grace about them.]

The lectionary scriptures for today are filled both with God's word and with people's refusal to hear it. It seems likely to me that the people to whom Amos delivered God's horrific message in the Hebrew scripture reading [Amos 8:1-12] thought they had been hearing God's word all along. After all, didn't they cease doing business during the New Moon and on the Sabbath? Hadn't they followed the letter of the law in many other regards? Wasn't their prosperity a sign from God of their righteousness? Weren't they justified in looking forward to the Day of the Lord when they would rejoice at the destruction of the enemies of Israel?

"No," said God. The rich and powerful in Israel, themselves, were the enemies of God. It was they who, on the Day of the Lord, would suffer death and destruction. It was they who would look everywhere for a word from God that would put an end to their suffering...but there would be no word.

I can't help but wonder if their habit of blocking out God's word in the ordinary course of their days was what made it impossible for them to hear God even when their very salvation was at stake.

How do you, how do I block out the Word of God as we live our lives?

It's easy for me to see how others in the world today are refusing to hear the word of God. Every morning the newspapers are full of stories of the rich cheating the poor—directly or more subtly: scam artists preying on the elderly and undereducated; corporations making huge profits at the expense of abjectly poor workers; foods contaminated because they are cheaper to make than pure varieties, and on and on. It's easy for me to see how others refuse to hear God's word, but what about me?

I see my failure to hear and respond to God's word reflected in the Martha story in this week's gospel lesson. She clearly thought she was doing what God asks—welcoming the guest, sharing from her resources, being a servant to others—but she let anxiety about getting it right and being the perfect hostess blind her to the gift that was there for her as well as for Mary. She failed to take in the gift of Jesus' presence—his Word—as she fretted about Mary's irresponsibility and all that had to be done.

I know something about Martha. When I gave a dinner party for Carole's birthday in May I fretted over everything. As a not terribly accomplished cook, I had chosen to make a fairly complicated Indian vegetarian meal and feared failure at every step. How absurd, given that the guests were all good, non-judgmental friends!

“Kate, Kate. You're anxious and upset about so many things, but only a few things are necessary—really only one.”

Jesus was not telling Martha—or me—not to try to prepare a lovely meal. He was not telling Martha—or me—to sit at his feet while someone else did the work. He was inviting Martha—and me—to recognize what was really important: the gathering, the community, with the Holy One at its center. So what if things took a little longer than people expected. So what if the food was not quite hot enough or moist enough. Those who had gathered were there to celebrate and grow in

love for one another. That was the necessary thing.

I let anxiety about many things keep me from hearing “words of amazement that stand against despair.” What keeps you from hearing?

## **SURRENDER**

Julie Palestrina

Sit down

Let go

Breathe in deep

Exhale slow

Unclench

Unwind

Ease up

Free the mind

No rules

No goal

Light heart

Quiet soul

Spoil the child

Spare the rod

Give up

Rest in God

So dinner parties are related to hope for the world. It seems to me that Jesus was saying to Martha that God's realm is potentially present in everything we do and every place we are. The practice of listening for God's word in every aspect of our lives equips us to stretch beyond the familiar, to reach further across the chasms that divide us from one another, from creation and from God. And, as Anna suggested in her sermon last week, the practice of listening for God's word—the practice of prayer—often begins in the most mundane places of discomfort in our lives.

## **DANGEROUS BUSINESS**

Emilie Griffin

Prayer is a very dangerous business. For all the benefits it offers of growing closer to God, it carries with it one great element of risk: the possibility of change...Don't we know for a fact that people who begin by "just praying"—with no particular aim in mind—wind up by trudging off to missionary lands, entering monasteries, taking part in demonstrations, dedicating themselves to the poor and sick?

I want to take a moment to talk about a small but persistent place of discomfort in my life. I do this with hesitancy because I'm not sure how it's related to "words of amazement that stand against despair," nor do I know at the moment how I will respond to the discomfort. But somehow, I believe this could be one small opportunity among the myriad of small opportunities that exist for each of us and all of us to bring

God's hope to each other and to a despairing world.

For many years I've been mildly troubled by what I perceive as a breach between Seekers Church and other parts of the Church of the Saviour, a breach that began in the mid-1970's when Seekers Church and the other small faith communities were being formed out of the C of S.

I live a few blocks from many of the ministries of the C of S. I try to attend Noon Prayers at the Festival Center and eat lunch at the "open table" at the Potter's House once a week, where I often hear a little of what's happening in this or that ministry or one or another faith community. I can't help but wonder what it would be like for Seekers—the church or individual members—to have more connections with our sisters and brothers in the extended C of S family. I can't help but wonder what might grow in "the capital of the free world" from something as small as the re-convergence of the varied expressions of God's word that are carried by the extended C of S family.

You—and I—will have to wait to see if this is a topic for another sermon, but in the meantime, I will need you to hold me accountable for listening for God's word in the matter, for asking me what I am hearing and how I am responding.

Is there anything I or others need to ask you to help you hear words of amazement that stand against despair?

I'd like to mention one last thing before I finish. In preparation for today, I read several commentaries and a few sermons based on today's lectionary. In one of the sermons I was struck by a pastor who said that he had invited members of the council of his church to spend 20-30 minutes at the beginning of each business meeting in prayer or Bible study. This proved to be impossible. Council members found such an expenditure of time a diversion from the business at hand.

I know that in several regular meetings at Seekers, such as

Stewards meetings, we begin with worship, and I have felt myself—and I believe, others—become a little restless or anxious that we needed to get on with our “work.” Is this a place of invitation to listen for the language of amazement rather than, like Martha, to be distracted by what the world expects?

Now, the final “interruption.”

## **THE PROCESS OF RESURRECTION**

Leonardo Boff

The resurrection is a process that began with Jesus and will go on until it embraces all creation.

Wherever an authentically human life is growing in the world, wherever justice is triumphing over the instincts of domination,

wherever grace is winning out over the power of sin,

wherever love is getting the better of selfish interest,

and wherever hope is resisting the lure of cynicism or despair,

there the process of resurrection is being turned into a reality.