

Public Prophecy at St Alfred's: Some Guidelines

“Those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” 1 Cor 14:3

Helpful Scriptures

Deuteronomy 18:14-22

Amos 3:7

1 Corinthians 12

1 Corinthians 14

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is bringing a message from God on a given subject at a given time by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It involves “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.” Prophecy occurs when a revelation from God is reported in a person’s (merely human) words. (Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology* p. 1049, 1057)

Prophecy at St Alfred's

We believe God still speaks to us. We are eager that people prophesy (1 Cor 14:39) so that the church and individuals will be built up (1 Cor 14:3)

The Purpose of Prophecy

We believe God speaks authoritatively through the Scriptures. God, however, may also speak through prophecy. The primary purpose is to build up the church (1 Cor 14). This can come when a prophecy is given to an individual or to the church as a whole. It is not about predicting the future.

Some Biblical Guidelines

- the gift of prophecy is to be desired and sought after (1 Cor 14:1)
- spiritual gifts are given for the good of others and are not a proof of spiritual maturity (1 Cor 12:7)
- prophecy is to be orderly and not out of control (1 Cor 14:32-40)
- what is said during a prophecy is under the control of the prophet (1 Cor 14:32)
- prophecy is not to be despised (1 Thess 5:19-22)
- prophecy is to be tested or evaluated (1 Cor 14:29-32)

Prophesying in Church Meetings: Some Guidelines

- all things are to be done in order and in a fitting way.
- if you have a prophecy pray to see whether it is to be given publicly, at this time. If you are unsure speak to one of the leaders
- use qualifying language such as “*I think the Lord might be saying...*” or “*I have a sense from God that ...*” This shows you are humble about what you have and also gives the listeners room to respond.
- the content of the prophecy should follow the 1 Cor 14:3 guidelines; it should be for edification, encouragement and comfort
- if the content includes more specific guidance or rebuke then it should be cleared with the senior minister or a staff member **before** it is given
- the person prophesying should avoid excessive emotion, haranguing language, judgmentalism, repetition or being overly long

Giving a Prophecy: Some Guidelines

There are three aspects to prophecy

- **revelation:** hearing what God is saying (could be a verse from Scripture, a dream, an impression etc)
- **interpretation:** having a sense of what the message means
- **application:** doing something with the message (could be given publicly; given privately; not given; used as a stimulus to intercede etc)

When you believe you have received a word from God:

1. Ask God whether you should speak it out

- don't assume that because you have received some revelation from God that you have permission to share it
- sometimes God reveals things to someone that are not to be shared (Dan 8:26; 2 Cor 12:4)
- is the prophecy for you, for another person, for the whole church?
- ask God when you should speak it out; timing is important (Prov 12:18, 25:11)

2. Get permission to speak from those in authority in the church

- "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Heb 13:17)
- it is helpful if you can warn one of the leaders in advance that you think you have something from God
- it is also helpful if you write it down; then it can be read and prayed about

3. Know the difference between revelation, interpretation and application

- it is possible to have an accurate revelation but a wrong interpretation
- only give what the Lord gives you – do not add to it
- the application may be to pray; it may be that you don't actually give out the prophecy
- if you are guided to give out a revelation from God, do it with humility

4. Leave the results to God

- once delivered (either to the leaders, to a person, to the church) your job is done
- the results are now up to God
- remember you could have got it wrong; remain humble

Responding to Prophecy: Some Guidelines

1. Spoken Prophecy

- when a prophecy is spoken out in a worship service, small group or some other setting the response will depend on the nature of the prophecy. It is up to the leader of the meeting (ie a service leader, small group leader) to determine the response. It is appropriate for the leader to pray that people will respond. It may be that there is an invitation to come and talk and pray after the meeting is finished.
- if the leader thinks the prophecy is wrong or inappropriate they must say that immediately so that the congregation or group are not left confused; if this were to happen the leader would then speak to the person giving the prophecy after the service to explain why they felt their prophecy was wrong or inappropriate; this is in line with “testing” and maintaining order.
- If the prophecy is tricky pastorally or theologically it would be best for the leader to ask that it be written down and not spoken out at the meeting. This then gives other leaders time to weigh it up and discern God’s leading.

2. Written Prophecy

- written prophecy will be given to the senior minister who will share it as he sees fit – possibly with staff, wardens, parish council, other leaders.
- the aim is to test the prophecy and seek God’s guidance what to do
- a person or group giving a written prophecy must trust the authority of the leaders and should not feel personally rejected if the leaders after praying choose not to do anything with the prophecy
- if deemed appropriate the senior minister or another designated leader will make the prophecy known in the church and ask God to direct the outcome

3. Individual Response

- if you believe a prophecy is for you, speak to a leader after the service and pray
- if you are certain this is from God and for you then obey what God is saying; thank God for what he has said to you; act on it
- it may be the revelation the person has given is accurate but their interpretation is wrong; listen carefully to the content of the revelation first
- don’t be gullible; test everything and weigh it up; if you are unsure speak to a leader and ask them to help you discern
- if you have difficulty with a prophetic word speak to a leader; be careful not to despise the prophecy or the person who took the risk to give it out

Testing and Weighing Prophecy: Some Guidelines

Here are 5 ways to test prophecy.

1. Test the prophecy against Scripture

- there should be no conflict with Scripture; if there is you should disregard the prophecy
- prophecy may add focus to a section of Scripture or even a verse; listen to God and weigh it up; check it against the context or the Bible as a whole to ensure there is nothing in conflict
- if you are uncertain that your reading of Scripture is correct or sound, talk to a church leader or the senior minister

2. Test the content

- is it encouraging, edifying or comforting?
- does it lead you to praise God and thank him for what he has done?
- does it lead to guilt and condemnation? this in an indication it may not be for you or it may not be from God; even a rebuke should lead you into a greater experience of God's grace and mercy
- hold on to what is good (1 Thess 5:21)

3. Test the person bringing the prophecy

- is the person humble before God and before the leaders of the church?
- are they known to be a mature, godly person?
- are they willing, even eager, to have their words tested?
- do they believe Scripture? (esp do they hold to truth about Jesus as the Son of God?)
- Both Old and New Testaments warn of false prophets (eg Isaiah 44:25, Jer 23:32, Ez 13:9, Mt 7:15-23, Acts 13:6, 2 Pet 2:1, 1 Jn 4:1, Rev 19:20)

4. Test the outcomes

- over time has the prophecy or prophet been beneficial to the group?
- are individuals and the church built up?
- does what was prophesied happen? (Dt 18:21-22)
- if the message is inaccurate it may not mean the person giving it is a "false prophet" but may have got the revelation or the interpretation or the application wrong; or it may be that some other part of their sinful nature has coloured what they said (eg pride may have caused them to say more than God gave them)

5. Test your own heart

- do you eagerly desire prophecy? (1 Cor 14:1)
- do you want to see the church built up?
- are you willing to be encouraged, edified, comforted and even rebuked in this way? or must God conform to some pattern of speaking to you that you have grown comfortable with?
- are you humble before God and before the church leaders, willing to grow as a disciple of Christ?

Peter MacPherson

Senior Minister, St Alfred's Anglican Church, Blackburn North

18/06/2014