

## Bibeltime Korsvei 2021, Prophetic Living, Rowan Williams, åpningsmøte tirsdag 20/7:

Hello, my name is Rowan Williams. I am speaking to you from Cardiff today -a very hot and sticky Cardiff.

And I am particularly sorry not to be able to be with you in person for the Korsvei meeting. I was looking forward very much to joining you in Norway, but unfortunately as you know the covid restrictions are still quite severe, and it is not possible for us to travel to some places at the moment without quarantine. But I wanted to send you personal greetings with the hope that this will be a wonderful encounter -a space for thinking, building friendships and building vision for the future. It's certainly something I regret very much, not being able to be with you in person, because as you all know there's something very special about the atmosphere of a festival. The ideas that are yours, the dreams and the thoughts that are yours, you suddenly realise are not just yours. You can share them with others, and share them in an atmosphere of openness and trust and celebration. Always one of the things I appreciate with festivals of any kind. And there's always that sense of the possibility of coming up against someone who will enlarge your heart and your mind in ways that you haven't expected. If I were with you, I must say I'd in the whole would prefer rather to be in a tent than in a camper. I like the atmosphere of tents if I am camping out. I like the smell of the earth and the smell of the grass, and even that rather musty and overpowering scent and atmosphere that you find in a tent has its own special character. Though -time for confession: It is rather a long time since I did actually spend a night in a tent.

If I were asked to say what's the most important, the most overwhelmingly important thing for a Christian to be involved in today, I'd have to say it's our witness and our work to wake up the world to the reality of environmental danger. It is a challenge we all share, it is one of the things which really and truly holds us together as a human race. We face that one problem in our one dwelling place, the one planet that is our home. We go on denying and delaying. Even if people do not actually deny the realities of climate change and environmental degradation, the actions they take or the actions they fail to take, we fail to take, tell their own story. Somehow, this is not really something we are taking with the seriousness it deserves. And this is not just one little marginal issue for Christians, because to be human in the sight of God is to be given above all the duty to share life and to bring life. We do that or we try to do that in the human world by our service of one another, by our practice of forgiveness, by our work for justice, by our struggle for honesty in our own lives. We do it in response to the overwhelming reality of the gift that's given us as Christians in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit. We are here to bring life and when we bring life, we do what we were made to do. If what we do is bringing death to our planet and therefore death to our fellow human beings and to the whole of the created order of which we are part, we are failing to live as God has made us to live. And that's why it is a central concern for all Christians. I hope that discussions and reflections and lectures shared during the days to come will keep that theme in focus. How do we share life, how do we give life?

And just one last thing to mention there. If we are going to give life to one another, we also have to be ready, humble enough, attentive enough and patient enough to receive life from one another. Not to be too proud to receive a gift from our neighbour, who is there to give us life also. It is a great pleasure and a great privilege to be invited to sharing this event, I am only sorry I can't be there in

person, but I do send the promise of my prayers and my blessings and my very, very best wishes to you!

Have a wonderful time at Korsvei!

## Bibeltime Korsvei 2021, Prophetic Living, Rowan Williams, Jeremiah Onsdag 21/7:

It's a very great pleasure and privilege to be able to speak to you, and I am very sorry that I can't be with you in person at this obviously very wonderful conference centre and for this very wonderful event. I wanted in this week's lectures to say a little bit about what I understand by the idea of "prophetic living". It seems to me that a Christian living in the world has to be in action as well as in words - a matter of prophetic witness. But what does that term actually mean when we talk about being a prophet? What do we have in mind? I imagine that many of us will think of great figures who have challenged authority, tyranny, figures that we look up to. Look back to Martin Luther King fighting against racism in the USA, Dietrich Bonhoeffer fighting against the Nazis in Germany, Archbishop Desmond Tutu resisting apartheid in South Africa, and those are dramatic figures, heroic, larger than life figures in many ways. What have they got to do with us? Because our lives are likely to be rather more prosaic, rather more modest.

And so I want to share with you some thoughts about a number of passages from the prophets of Hebrew Scripture - to see if they have any light to throw on how we might understand the business of prophetic living. And when we look at the prophets, the encounter in Hebrew Scripture, and ask: What is it that they are doing? I think the most important answer is perhaps that they were calling their people, calling their nation to be itself. They speak in and to the people of Israel, and they say to that people: "Be what you are called to be - Be what you are meant to be". Now, the people of Israel in Hebrew Scripture were reminded of this quite often - are not just one nation, one people among others. In fact, you could say that the people of Israel as a whole has a prophetic calling. There is a well-known passage in Hebrew Scripture where Moses says: Would that all the Lord's people were prophets - a sense that the entire community of Israel has a prophetic role in the world. As if they are saying to the entire world: "We are calling you to be what God wants you to be, and what you can be". So, within the people of Israel the individual prophet is calling the whole people, the whole community to be more prophetic. To live in such a way that it can declare to the world who God is, what God does, what God invites us to, what God asks from us. Above all, what God makes possible for us as human beings. God's people in Hebrew Scripture exist so that we may know what is possible under God for human beings. The prophet calls them back to that witness in the presence of the whole world.

So, the prophet may be an individual figure, but the prophet as an individual is also upheld by the calling of a whole community. And that's certainly worth remembering these days. The prophet isn't an individual hero, somebody so exceptional and so isolated from the life of the rest of the community that the rest of us just look on in amazement. The prophet belongs in the community. And for the prophet in ancient Israel the reality of God's covenant with Israel and God's promise, the reality of God's invitation and commandment to live together in justice, in peace and mercy, and the reality of the great acts of shared worship which express the identity of God's people. All of that was what upheld the prophets in their witness to Israel and to the whole world.

So, if we think about our calling to live prophetically against that background - all these things should be in our minds. We are first and foremost trying to say to our own communities. Live with more integrity, with a greater depth and a greater excitement of witness to who God is and what God makes possible. We are trying to keep our community prophetic in its relation to the entire world. To declare to the world of cynicism and hostility, a world of deep division, poverty, oppression, and violence, - what is possible. And we speak of that in and to the world by how we live together.



If we read verses that come at the very beginning of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, we see some of the challenges that the prophet faces. It may well be that Jeremiah himself felt a bit as we do. We think: Oh, I could never be like Martin Luther King or Desmond Tutu. And perhaps Jeremiah felt "I could never be like Hosea or Amos or Isaiah". And here at the beginning of the narrative, of how he is called by God, he says –"I can't do this. I am a child, at least a young man. I have no experience; I have no authority to speak". Already Jeremiah recognises that being a prophet is a difficult sacrificial calling which doesn't have very much to do with how you could be sure of succeeding or getting on top of your situation.

Each of the prophets in Hebrew Scripture has their own voice, almost like their own musical key. We recognise the different tone that they use. And the prophesies of Jeremiah are very much shaped a particular kind of voice. A voice that recognises loneliness and cost, weakness and struggle. Right from the first chapter where Jeremiah protests that he is inexperienced, that he has no authority, no experience to call on. Right from the beginning he struggles against the demands of his calling. And he expresses with great force and energy the cost to him. The suffering that comes with speaking out. And we know that his speaking out against injustice led to his imprisonment and execution. So Jeremiah's prophecy really takes us very close to the idea of prophecy as something which is not about success. Not even about dramatic and charismatic and powerful witness. It is just itself -it is an act of witness, a declaration. And there will always be a great gulf between the task that the prophet is given and the capacity that the prophet has. We ourselves know perfectly well that our ability to be effective, truthful and faithful witnesses is going to be very limited. But we are not called to live and speak prophetically because we are good at things, we have certain skills, we have a record of success. We are called, -and I think this will come true a bit more later in this week, we are called simply because God wants us and the whole of our humanity to speak of him in our weakness and in our strength. Jeremiah begins by protesting that he has no maturity to speak, he is only a youth or a child. He protests again and again during the book about the cost that he carries, and yet he continues. Even in that atmosphere of rejection and threat where his life is at risk and his wellbeing internally and externally is constantly undermined. So for him prophetic living is not a triumph or a heroic calling. And it is not particularly directed towards a successful outcome. We hear of his encounters with those in power, we hear of the king tearing up and burning the prophetic writings that he has completed, we hear of his imprisonment, we hear of priest and politicians alike telling him to leave the court, to be silent and to speak no more. And yet as he himself says -I will come back to this in a minute- when he tries not to speak something boils up in him that can't be contained or silenced. But it is not as though he ever gets particularly close to the leaders of power -he is never in a position where he can dictate what happens, to king or government. His voice is heard by some -the king secretly listens to him, and yet again and again what he recommends is not fulfilled. People listen and then they turn away. If Jeremiah had had to complete one of those self-assessment forms that trouble all of us these days, he wouldn't be able to record very much in the way of achievement and success. And there again Jeremiah's life and his language may speak very particularly to those of us who live in a world, in a society where our church no longer has quite the cultural or social or political power that it once did. In this country once upon a time the established church, the Church of England, protected by the law of the land, was able to control many aspects of social life and educational life. Not so these days. I know that the same is true in churches in Scandinavia, in Germany and many other parts of Europe.

As Christians in today's world we are likely to be very conscious that we are more on the margins, we are further away from the historic influence that we once exercised. But that we are told right at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, that is not what matters. The ground of what we say, the vindication of what we have to say to our society, to our church, to our world does not lie in our



ability to control, to make decisions for others. It has to do with the fact that what we say and do is grounded and rooted in God's own testimony, to God's own self. Here again in these texts of the beginning of the book of Jeremiah -what God says to the prophet is: "Long before you were born I knew you, you were in my mind", says God, from before the beginning of your life. You have a role, a part in this immense complicated world that is coming here to be. You have a part that no one else can play. And whether people listen or not, whether your words succeed or make a difference or not, is neither here nor there. You are there to speak, to show what you have been shown. So the basis of Jeremiah's prophetic call and prophetic work is not that he is experienced, intelligent, skilful, resourceful. The basis of his words and his work and his life is that God has known him, recognized him from before the beginning of his life. He has existed -you can say- in God's own imagination. Expressing just by his being Jeremiah, something only he can express, -of God's glory. So young or old, skilful or unskilful, successful or unsuccessful -he must be who he is, and speak out from where he is, to the culture and the society and the community he is part of.

Prophetic living begins then in a divine purpose and a divine disclosure. God speaks in the reality, the distinctness of the life of each one of us. God has something to show in you and me. Just in being who we are. The more deeply we recognise that, the more we enter into that mystery of God's calling, the more is shown to us and the more our reactions are responses in the world, we reflect of the richness of God's purpose. Very simply, we have been shown something and we have been told to show it. We seek to see it more fully, -the more we see it, the more we are compelled to speak about it, and point to it.

That brings me back to the theme, which comes so often later in the book of Jeremiah. The struggles that Jeremiah has with his calling. The sense that it would be much easier if he did not have to bear this witness and carry this ministry. At one point, he says again very movingly that when he tries not to speak, he cannot contain it, he cannot vote himself in. It is, he says, like a fire in his bones -he has to speak out. Because when he does not express the mystery that has been shown to him, when he does not have the opportunity to share what has been given to him -it is as if he becomes less himself. He suffers, he pays a price. He is aware that not speaking makes him less than he really is. He is damaged when he doesn't witness. He is hurt when he can't speak of God. And that, he would say, is very near the heart of real prophetic action and prophetic living. Because when we say that about a prophetic person, we are saying something very central about how God works in human life and human experience. The person who witnesses deeply and consistently to God is a person for whom that witness, that celebration of God is simply part of who they are. It is not an extra, it is not something added on to who they are, it is not something that they do sometimes and then stop doing. Jeremiah speaks of a fire in his bones, a deep urge to speak and to share. He is saying: I can't be myself if I can't speak of the gifts I have received and the glory that I have seen. It is very like a real musician or a real poet. Their poetry, their music isn't something added on to who they are. If they can't perform their music, write their poetry, paint their paintings, they are less than they might be. They are hurt and damaged by not being able to reflect what they have seen-and what has been given to them. And it is if Jeremiah is telling us: That is what the prophet is like -like the painter, like the musician, like the poet -the gift and vision that's been shared is something that must find its way out, or we shall be less than we truly are.

And that takes us to what I think is a very important aspect of thinking about the prophetic. Sometimes people think of prophetic life and action as something that is in some way opposed to or in tension with a life of vision or contemplation or adoration. To put it very crudely: people sometimes think prophets are noisy and mystics are quiet. But that can't be quite right if we take Jeremiah seriously. He is absorbing the reality of God. It's painful, it stretches him beyond bearing, it takes him to places where he doesn't want to go, and yet he acknowledges this is him. He can't be

himself without following that vision -absorbing that mystery into himself. So prophecy and the adoration of God, gazing in quiet upon God, those are not opposed to one another; they belong together. The prophet's energy comes from the fact that they have been soaked through with vision and possibility. And now they can't be themselves unless they let that come through. As a matter of fact, if you look at the lives of many of the great prophetic figures we think about, you will see that blend of prophetic public action and speaking with very deep roots in quiet, in adoration, in the shared absorption of God's mystery and God's beauty.

I mentioned earlier Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his resistance to the Nazis, was most definitely nourished and strengthened by his daily discipline of quiet reflection, by the almost monastic rhythm of his prayer. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has often spoken about his sense that the more he was called on to do and to say, the more time he had to give to silent prayer. He will spend up to two hours every day in that silence, long before work began in the morning, and he liked to say that he was too busy to pray for less than two hours every day. So whether we are looking at prophecy in Hebrew Scripture or the kinds of prophetic life we see in more recent times, that holding together of great full and loving gazing with action and courage is part of the picture -and a very important part. The call to prophetic living is -you could say- a call to integrity. To be yourself at one with God in the act of witness. Because you had a vision of what humanity is like -when it is at one with God. You have been given some sense of what the human world might be if it were really open to the living God and God's work of healing and restoration.

So we don't and we can't oppose prophetic living and spiritual life. In Scripture, both Hebrew and Christian, the work of the Spirit and the life of the Spirit is always to do with weaving deep connections. The Spirit is given so that we may see how things are connected, how things are united and above all that we may see how heaven and earth are united. How the creator and the creation are connected. And how we humans, part of the creation, can be connected and reconnected with our maker. So the Spirit is at work in our silent absorbing, our receiving of the divined mystery -and the Spirit is also at work in the building of relationship -the struggle to communicate with the world around. As I said, that struggle may or may not be successful. But we are all called to recognize fellow human beings in that process and to try to make ourselves recognizable to them. When people look at Christians trying to live prophetically, are they able to say: I don't quite understand this, but I recognize that this is human in a very deep way, in a very deep sense. It's a bit of a tragedy when you think about it that quite often when people look at the life of Christian communities, they see something that for whatever reason seems to them less human, less honest, less full. But the lives of some of the great prophetic figures I've mentioned -like Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Theresa, Dorothy Day in the United States of America -you may or may not agree with them. You may or may not feel you are able to imitate them. But one thing that is very hard to say is that they are somehow less human. They are figures with weaknesses, figures with problems and flaws. But that very fact shows a humanity -a willingness to go on working at their fragility, letting God come true more fully.

Jeremiah begins with a protest. This is not for me. I am not up to it, I haven't got the skill, the age, the authority. God's reply is simply that he has put Jeremiah in a certain position. He has given him a word to speak -not just to Israel but to the nations. Because he knew him, recognized him before his life began. So Jeremiah is able to embark on his ministry as a prophet, because he knows what he has seen. A glimpse of the God who works before any of us were born, beyond the death of any of us, who works constantly in every corner of creation -to bring about healing and reconciliation -to connect heaven and earth. Jeremiah doesn't know, any more than most of us know, exactly what part he has in that story. He can't be sure of triumph and success, and a lot of the time what he is mostly aware of is failure, loneliness, hostility, ineffectiveness, familiar enough to most of us. We



long to make a bigger difference, we long in some way to be able to control the outcome of what we do. And yet God doesn't ask us to win and to succeed. God asks us to stay there where we are within creation. Doing what we can from where we are and as who we are. There is a place for us in the mind of God. In what a few moments ago I called the imagination of God. What God thinks of, what God holds, in God's creation of all things, includes whatever it is that I can say and do with integrity as I myself become more fully receptive to, absorbing of, the life of God. God wants humanity to be at one with him, and of course at one with each other. There are some aspects of God's eternal divine wisdom expressed in creation that mysteriously only I can realise and communicate. I may not be able to put that into words, I may not know what it is, but living prophetically is living in the confidence. But what I say and do in witness to God's purpose is worth doing. Part of what God is doing. Not fulfilling a program of my own, but putting myself at the disposal of a God who wants to work in the whole creation towards mercy and renewal and restoration. That's why a community that seeks to live out something of what God is like, in mercy and service and compassion, is a prophetic community. And it's why within those prophetic communities there still need to be prophetic individuals. Saying to Israel, saying to the church, your life is not yet distinctive enough, not yet speaking eloquently and clearly enough of how God is different, how God works from different standards with different purposes on what goes on in the world. If everything God does is directed towards healing and restoration, can we say that the life of the church is like that? Jeremiah says to Israel centuries ago: Your life as a people is not really like that, whatever you say, you are still a subject to idoltry, running after the gods you are comfortable with and the goals you are comfortable with -and you are called back to show what the true God is like.

And so, for us, we know all too well, that Church doesn't look very much a witness to that great universal reconciling purpose. And yet that is what it's there for. Whether the church is prominent in public life, powerful or not, is completely irrelevant. Just as whether I as an individual, powerful or successful is irrelevant. God simply asks that we are there for his light to shine through. That we are caught up in a vision of what he wants to such an extent we couldn't imagine, being ourselves without sharing and passing on that vision. Sometimes in words, sometimes in actions, sometimes it may be just in the look on our faces, the carriage of our bodies. When we worship, as St Paul reminds his friends in the first letter to Corinthians, when we worship, we hope and pray that something of the Spirit that joins earth to heaven will be visible to the outsider -to the person who doesn't see the point. We hope and we pray that something comes through of the gift of reconciliation, bringing heaven and earth together.

So, as we conclude this first reflection on Jeremiah, let's reflect in our thoughts and our prayers during the day a bit on some of what he might have to teach us. Let's remember first of all that our own sense of what we are capable of is not really where God begins. God begins by creating us and calling us and saying: What I give you, my life that I pour out in you and for you, and what I give is there to be shared. If you can't or won't share it, you will be less than you were called to be, and less than you were made to be. As we will see later on in our reflections, all of that is focused on the gift that comes to a climax in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. But for now, we stay with those more general terms of Hebrew Scripture. We may not be aware of any skill that equips us for prophetic living, but God simply says: Show what you have been shown. As you do that you will find that you can't live without showing it. Find those ways of showing it that are not simply threatening or arrogant, but simply lifegiving, opening the door of joy, live out the gift that you have been given. We are bound to be afraid, apprehensive about failure and isolation.

So remember again Jeremiah's life, Jeremiah's calling is sustained by that awareness of God's eternal knowledge of him, and sustained by the community he lives in which continues to pray and serve and witness without interruption. Think, if you can, also about some of the situations in your own lives

where you have been encountered deep pressure upon you where you realised that you had to speak out somewhere. You have seen humanity abused, demeaned, diminished, you have seen injustice, you have seen violence and you have felt a pressure to speak out, and you know that you will be less than yourself if you didn't. Think about whether you have had that kind of experience in private or in public. But perhaps most importantly of all, keep praying for a deepening trust in the universal wisdom of God. The wisdom, which has made all things, the wisdom which speaks and lives in every part of creation, and move towards the fulfilment of God's purpose. Pray for the trust to see yourself within that wisdom, the working of that purpose. You may be like Jeremiah, conscious of incapacity and weakness. Not being adequate to what you have been called to do. You may find perhaps that language about prophetic living feels a bit remote, a bit exaggerated. But finally, what it comes to is having the confidence that there is some facet, some aspect of God's infinite wisdom and infinite beauty which is yours to show. Because you and you alone have received that particular gift. And your life is really about finding the ways of sharing it in such a way that it points others towards the infinite wisdom of God the creator. So let's just listen very briefly as we conclude -to the words that Jeremiah heard and spoke.

*The word of the Lord came to me saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations". Then I said: "Lord God, truly I do not know how to speak for I am only a boy". But the Lord said to me: "Do not say I am only a boy, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you", says the Lord. Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me: "Now I have put my words in your mouth".*



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When we turn to the prophetic writings of Ezekiel we find ourselves in a very different world from that of Jeremiah. It's a world of dramatic, colourful vision, it's a word of sharply defined challenge once again. But also, a world in which more of the risks and the struggles of the prophetic vocation come through once more. And in the third chapter of the prophecy of Ezekiel we find a very eloquent and a very unusual account of why it is hard to speak prophetically. God says to Ezekiel that he is sending him to his own people. You are not sent to a people of obscure speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel. Not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. In other words, it is as if God is saying to the prophet: It will be hard for you to speak to your own people. Because the words you use, the message you give will seem all too familiar. These are people who know what a prophet sounds like, these are people who have heard already what you have to say. It is not as if you are giving something completely new to them. You are telling them: Go back to where you began, be new again yourselves. Be born again, you might almost say. And Ezekiel's prophecies very often return to that theme of a new beginning. God clothing dry bones with flesh and spirit: God taking away the heart of stone in us, to replace it with a heart of flesh. New beginnings, but how do we talk about new beginnings, new possibilities, new creation in a language that's become familiar and perhaps stale or boring? And there is a strange thing: if Ezekiel were more exotic for his audience, if he looked or sounded more of a stranger, perhaps they'd paid more attention? But here he is, a familiar figure, saying familiar things. How much harder it is to be renewing, to be radical, to be prophetic in that environment. You remember Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man enduring his punishment after death, pleads that Lazarus may go rising from the dead, to return to the world and warn the rich man's family. And he is told they already have Moses and the prophets. They already know the call, the challenge, the vocation, they already know that wealth must be shared, they already know that the poor have dignity and hope -and they weren't acting on it. And Jesus ends the parable with those very solemn words: If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, can they listen even if somebody were to rise from the dead?

So that is Ezekiel's challenge as it set out here in the third chapter of his book. And when I read it, I think of some of those reflections which the great Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his letters from prison. Some of you will have read those astonishing letters and will remember how he talks there about the difficulty of finding words for God. He says, writing a letter to his godson on the day of the little boy's baptism, he says: Our old words are losing their power. Jesus was able to speak words that changed the situation he was in and changed the hearts of women and men. But we, we simply push around the familiar words into new combinations, we play games with our ideas, our concepts, our images. And somehow those familiar words don't change anything. People look or listen, and they think, well we know what Christians are likely to say. And even if, as in most northern European societies, the Church now has so much less presence and influence, people will still be aware, that yes, the Church is part of history, part of the tourist industry, a little bit of picturesque background for our lives, which we turn to on rather rare occasions for some kind of support. And whatever else we say and however hard we try to break through, people so often assume they know what the Church is there for; a decoration for what we are now told to call "heritage reasons", but they don't expect renewal. They don't expect the challenge of new beginnings. How do we find words that change things? And that's where Bonhoeffer famously says: The words of religion are not what we need and they are not the words that Jesus himself uses. When Jesus tells his stories in the gospels, they don't use religious words and they very seldom use religious characters. Jesus picks out of the



tapestry of human life, stories and interactions, that simply show newness, that show a different kind of living. Jesus picks out from the tapestry of human life, we could say, those moments when human life becomes prophetic. When human life is lived in such a way that we understand more things are possible than we ever believed. And he tells stories about the natural processes of the world over time in spite of all probability. Something new comes to birth, a seed falls into the ground, and when the plant comes up it's nothing like the seed. Or he tells stories about those human interactions. A son runs away from home and he is welcomed back on his return as if he had been longed for and missed every second of every minute of every day, as if he was the most treasured and beautiful presence there could be. And in those moments of seeing how the world works, in those moments of unexpected, glorious, and graceful human interaction, Jesus says, the world and human world become prophetic. They show more than we could ever have believed. They open up to newness, to a new creation, a new depth of reality.

We need as Christians to listen carefully to the words we use. We need to understand why certain forms of words sound -lifeless. They come out of our mouths, you might say and they fall on the ground before they even reach anyone else's ears. Prophetic words are not like that. Prophecy makes the connection between person and person, that's why we talk of prophecy as the work of the Spirit. Because the Spirit always makes connection between God and the world, between person and person. The prophetic word is both truly unexpected and deeply recognizable. It's fresh and surprising and yet the person who hears it says: "In a way I have always known that and hoped that it was true". Can we as Christians speak and act in such a way that people around will say: I always hoped that was true. I always hoped that was possible, I thought forgiveness might be a reality and now I see it. I thought that hope for the despised and the outcast was a reality, and now I see that it is. In that sense the word of prophecy and the life of prophecy are a way of communicating to people around -that what they most long to be true is being made flesh as we speak. And that is something I hope we can think about a little bit further later on in the week when we reflect on Jesus himself as a prophetic life.

So we could say the task in front of us is not just translating unfamiliar things into familiar language. The task is finding new stories and new actions in which the language we speak becomes flesh, becomes real and visible. You see sometimes we Christians think, well we have quite a lot of complicated doctrines and ideas, we have a very varied, challenging set of biblical texts to make sense of. What we need to do is put it in language that everybody can understand. Well, I am not opposed to putting things in language that people can understand. As a priest and a preacher, I have to ask myself about that every time I open my mouth, and I certainly have to ask myself that question when I speak to an audience that indeed doesn't share my first language. But the problem lies deeper than just helping people make sense of what's being said. The problem is that of speaking in such a way that it doesn't seem old and familiar and stale, and just a repetition of received and rather dead wisdom. We need the stories of renewal, we need the parables like the stories that Jesus tells. And of course, when we think about that a bit more, that means that we ourselves as Christians have to be ready to rediscover what we think we know. The words that are familiar in our ears, have to become new as well. Many years ago I came across an American book with the title: Reading the Bible as If for the First Time. And that is something which actually is very hard for us to do, because for most of us Christians we think we have read it, we think we know what's there, and it is quite hard to recapture the impact of encountering parts of the Bible as if for the first time. Being surprised, being shocked, being puzzled -going away with new questions, new possibilities, new horizons. I was remembering something which was told me years ago by a friend, who had been reading a book in a library of his seminary. And one of the seminary professors had come up beside him and had said: What are you reading, and my friend had mentioned the name of the book he was reading which I have to say is a very remarkable and beautiful book -I won't go into detail. And the



professor said: "I am very sorry to hear that and my friend said: Why? Don't you think it is a good book?" And the professor said: "It is a wonderful book, but it means you'll never again be able to read it for the first time". I have always treasured that insight because there is something very special about reading for the first time. And the problem that Ezekiel is exploring in these words in his prophecy is the problem of recreating something of that freshness of reading for the first time. For ourselves, not just for those we speak to, for the church, not just for the world outside, we need to sit with the Bible and the language of public worship, the ideas of the creeds and the tradition, we need to sit with those and listen hard until something of the strangeness, the oddity comes through to us. We've forgotten what a strange story this is. And yet a story which although it's strange -it is what we all long to be true. We need to listen to what would sound odd, fresh, alien, difficult in the language we use. We mustn't just let it flow out without question, without exploration. We need to allow our own faith to become mysterious and exciting for us again. Because if it isn't, it won't be mysterious and exciting for others. We need to listen with the ears of other people, but we also need to listen for ourselves.

So that, it seems, is where Ezekiel is beginning in his reflection of his ministry, aware that it is hard to find the words that will be new. But the scene changes almost immediately in this third chapter of the book. Ezekiel comes among the exiles -those who have been thrown out of their homeland and are now in a foreign country with no obvious hope of return. Looked at as pitiable or contemptible or insignificant by all those around them. Ezekiel goes to the kind of people whose experience is reflected in Psalm 137: By the waters of Babylon, I sat down and wept when I remembered Zion. And those around treat the sorrow, the deep grief and homesickness of the exiles as a curiosity, almost as entertainment: "Oh you are from somewhere else -sing us one of your old songs, that will be interesting". But the grief goes so much deeper. Ezekiel comes among the exiles, he comes among those who have lost, it seems, almost everything. And notice his response, he doesn't immediately stand up and deliver words of prophecy. He sits among the exiles. Here is what he says: *I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. I came to the exiles of Tel Abib who lived by the river Kebar and I sat there among them stunned for seven days. At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me.* Seven days of silence, seven days of being shocked, stunned, overwhelmed. The level of loss and grief that surrounds him is something that drives the prophet first of all to silence. He doesn't pontificate to them, he doesn't speak to them from a great height, he sits there and lets the grief and the pain sink into his flesh and bones -as if rain was falling on him. First of all, he has to understand the depth of the loss, the depth of the sorrow, into which he is speaking. It is if God had said to him - Don't think you have an answer just because you have a vision. It takes time for the vision of God, the blazing bewildering vision of God that comes in the first chapter of Ezekiel, it takes time for that to be digested, to be spoken, in a way that can bring hope and healing. But meanwhile sit there and don't be afraid of being overwhelmed, don't be ashamed of having nothing to say. Sometimes prophetic living is about that silent patience. Your willingness to sit alongside grief, bewilderment and sorrow, to sit alongside without solutions and answers. Sometimes that is at the very least the beginning of a true prophetic presence.

I know that today in Norway you are commemorating the terrible violent tragic events of ten years ago. The appalling random slaughter of so many young and innocent people. The manifestation of an insane murderous rejecting world-view at the hands of a deeply damaged person, whose soul it seems had been fractured and destroyed by inner and outer pressures - to the extent that he knew only how to deal destruction in the world around. What can be said about that? I don't have the words, nor do you. In a way I prefer almost now to stop speaking so that we can together sit with the memory of that terrible event, until somehow we are enabled by the word of the Lord to stand up and find hope again, together. I know that you will be spending time today, reflecting on that, praying with that memory, and it may matter to you to remember Ezekiel sitting there stunned

without the words. It's no shame not to have the words, what is wanted is presence and accompaniment. And we all know this in so many contexts in our personal lives, when we are with somebody who has been through deep trauma and grief. What can we do? Be present, accompany. Perhaps the words will come, perhaps they won't. But first comes presence and patience. Once again, we will be thinking more about that in relation to the person of Jesus, the prophet whose prophetic presence includes also his own shared presence among us. Not just the words he speaks or the challenges he gives.

Don't imagine that because you have a vision, you have an answer. That was the phrase I used a few minutes ago. But let's think just a little bit further before we finish about the nature of Ezekiel's vision. The prophetic life does begin in vision, and the vision that starts of the book of Ezekiel is a particularly dramatic, bewildering one. It's a vision where once again language, words seem to fall short, the prophet keeps on saying: It was like this and like that, it had the appearance of something that was rather like something that was a bit of the nature of, and the images pile up, and nobody has ever really been able to imagine or visualize what that vision was really like. So baffling was this chapter, that in the days of the early Rabbis, just after the time of Jesus, you were forbidden to read the first chapter of Ezekiel until you were at least 30 years old. It was too troubling, intoxicating, terrifying and exciting. God's coming produces both the outpouring of sometimes almost contractionary words like the first chapter of Ezekiel. The images piling on one another, not knowing what to say, just as it produces a silence where the words would never work. And that silence, that failure of words in the presence of God, that's one of the points that touches the failure of words in the presence of human suffering and pain. The prophet experiences both kinds of silence, and I think that's what these first chapters of Ezekiel remind us of. The prophet's words fail when confronted with the glory of God, and the prophet's words fail confronted with the loss and the sorrow and the suffering of humanity, and indeed the whole created world. The silence of adoration and the silence of deep compassion seem to belong together.

So we might say, prophetic living becomes credible, it communicates when two things are going on. First of all when people can see true solidarity, when they can see that those who are trying to live prophetically in prophetic faith are really identified with the world they are in, with its grief and its need, with its hope and its joy as well. We are credible when we are seen to be identified alongside, sharing in a situation. We are credible when we share the bewilderment, even the confusion of those around when confronted with, so difficult, demanding and apparently cruel world. We are not credible when we come up with a quick solution from the outside. Like Ezekiel we have to be prepared to be stunned, prepared to be silenced, to be truly in the middle of those experiencing the struggle and the pain. I suppose that's why incidentally in the book of Job, God at the very end when he appears, says to Job: You have spoken well of me, and turning to Job's friends, says they have not. Job has spoken well of God because Job has not been afraid to express his loss, his grief and his complete bewilderment. And his friends have not spoken well of God, they have not been credible because they haven't sat with Job in the middle of his confusion, been silent with him. Initially we are told they sit in silence, but then they find all kind of things to say at great length. They needed to have sat a little bit longer and shared a bit more deeply. But then the second thing, that makes what we say and do credible, is when the words we speak and the lives we live are really in some way a window into a different world, a window into the glory and beauty of the divine. It's been said that one of the things that all holy people do is to convey to those around them that the space they live in is larger. The saint, and I would say, the prophet make more room in the world than there would otherwise be. Because their own minds and hearts have been broken up by the grace of God. They are somehow able to open doors and windows, to say to people: The world is larger than you thought, humanity is greater than you thought, the natural environment around us is greater than you thought, it's shot through with God's glory and God's working. So prophetic living is living that



makes space, that makes room for a larger conception of who we are, and where we are. We are least credible, least believable as Christians when we give the impression that to be a Christian you must live in a smaller world rather than a larger one. And God forgive us, that is the impression that sometimes we have given. As if to be a Christian you have to leave a large percentage of your humanity outside the door of the church. No, we, trying to live in the prophetic spirit of God in Jesus Christ, we are committed to showing that the world is more than we thought. That the value, the depth, the glory of human beings is more than we thought. And just because we see that, we can see more clearly just what a tragedy, just what an atrocity it is when human lives are destroyed, when human welfare is forgotten, when the weak and the unimportant are left to die. That is a problem on any showing, but it's a particular problem for Christians who believe that even the least, the most obscure, the most poor, the most vulnerable of human beings is of infinite worth. There is more than we could ever imagine to them. So any life lost, any life apparently wasted, is for us a tragedy. Our lives open doors and windows, they show that there is more, ultimately they show that there is more to the whole of creation than we can see, because in every part and at every moment the energy and the beauty of the Creator are at work within it. So, we become believable, we make connections in the spirit, we communicate, we are credible in prophetic living when those two things are present. A depth of compassion, an identification, and a sense of a depth of glory and value and beauty within the world, and especially in the lives and the faces of those who bear the image of God, men and women like ourselves. And if we can bear those two things in mind, perhaps we should do what Bonhoeffer so longed to see, perhaps we can find words and stories and images -that are not just the expressions of another tribal language, the language of another "in-group", but language that suggests a great new landscape opening up in every direction -the landscape of new creation. When we were thinking about Jeremiah, we were reminded of how the prophetic and the mystical belong together. The prophetic courage to name evil, the mystical call to adoration and a confidence in the power of God. And Ezekiel is telling us again to hold two things together; deep compassionate accompaniment in the midst of a suffering world, an accompaniment that sometimes stuns us and silences us, but also some kind of clarity and openness to that great new landscape, in the light of which we can see why the suffering of the world is so dreadful.

And so as we reflect on Ezekiel, perhaps some of the thoughts that could be in our minds are these: We can perhaps think of the poets and the artists who helped us develop something of that excitement and bewilderment that Ezekiel expresses when he sees the mystery of God revealed. We can give thanks for those who have helped us to see divine action in all its glory in unexpected places. But we also be thinking today of some of the moments in our encounters with one another. Sometimes with those who seem to be closest to us. When we thought we were speaking the same language, and we discovered we are not. When a great gulf appears -a gulf of understanding and sympathy, we find ourselves baffled and silenced by that. And then above all, we will be thinking of those moments where we are driven to silence, just sitting with the pain and the loss, accepting that we can't rush to a solution, that we can't just, as we sometimes say to little children, "kiss it better". We think of those memories, those narratives of lives where we can see little but tragedy, and we sit not with the solution, but with hope. The prophetic word is not in the answer we provide. The prophetic word is in the presence that God provides. And so we trust that in our silence, our sitting in the midst of this, God gives something of what God wants to give, the spirit, the connection with God, and so the renewal of hope and the reality of new creation.





## Bibeltime Korsvei 2021, Prophetic Living, Rowan Williams, Hosea Fredag 23/7:

For the Jewish rabbis the prophecy of Hosea was often seen as one of the most important documents of all the prophetic literature, and at least one Jewish commentary that I have seen objects very strongly to the way in which in the Christian Bible Hosea and other writers are described as the minor prophets, the lesser prophets, as opposed to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel. Nothing lesser about Hosea in the eyes of these Jewish interpreters. And it is possible to understand why. Hosea, of course, is the longest of those books that we sometimes call the minor or the lesser prophets, but it's also a book not unlike Ezekiel and not unlike Jeremiah - a very strong, very personal passion. It begins with a passage that is bound to cause a lot of difficulty, even offence to many modern readers. Hosea describes his own marriage to an unfaithful woman, and like so many angry, betrayed men he seems to blame her for everything, and to blame her children also. It doesn't make for pleasant or easy reading. We would quite like to hear the other side of the story and to hear the story as Gomer, his wife tells it. But I want us to think about this story in the background of Hosea's prophecies in a particular light, not just the story of an angry disillusioned man, making contemptuous, and even hateful observations about his wife and his children. I want us to read it as something that tells us about the nature of disappointment. The sense indeed of betrayal.

The book of Hosea begins by depicting a relationship which, it seems, is doomed to fail. I think of Hosea as looking back to the beginning of his marriage and saying, It's as if God told me go and marry an unfaithful woman as if this was my doom. This was my destiny, this is what had to happen. But surely what he is describing is the bitterness of someone who's invested hope and love in a relationship, that has then become sour and destructive. And we all of us know relationships like that and have suffered from them and very often women especially have suffered from being blamed for that failure, blamed for that destructiveness. Hosea is talking about a very particular kind of bitterness in our feeling. The bitterness that comes when we feel that our hopes and our loves have been let down and that what we have invested in a relationship is somehow wasted. As if it doesn't make any sense or is of no value at all when we look back at the destructive conclusion that has followed from all the work or the effort and above all, all the hope we have put into this.

But the book of Hosea like all the books of the great prophets, is not just a depiction of human feelings. You could say that it is an exploration of those human feelings in the confidence that they will tell us something about God. As the book of Hosea continues it's clear that for Hosea the experience of the betrayal and the experience of being let down and disappointed, is somehow giving him deeper and deeper insight into God and more particularly into the way God deals with God's people. The book of Hosea as a whole shows an understanding emerging that God's love is strong enough to overwhelm, to negate almost the experience of betrayal. And most strikingly of all it leads to a recognition, especially in chapter 11 of the book, that in some sense God cannot walk away from this relationship, God cannot give up on the divine commitment to God's people. Hosea's sense of betrayal first of all gives him a glimpse of a God who is being betrayed, let down, disappointed by the behaviour of the people to whom God has given such commitment, with whom God has shared such gifts. But as the prophet thinks more deeply about this, he sees that God simply cannot do otherwise. God's freedom has shown itself in God's commitment. God's absolute power and unceasing love, his loving kindness, in Hebrew "His Hesed", that wonderful Hebrew word for the instinctive yearning of the innermost self towards the other. That remains so much part of God that God can say in chapter 11: How could I give you up o, Israel, how could I stop loving you, without stopping being God? So, the relation of God to those whom God loves, is something so deep that it is almost organic, almost as if God and those he loves are part of one reality. God includes us in the divine life, the divine reality. And so, can't say no to us, without saying no to the divine self. And



that's why also later in the book of Hosea, we find the relationship of God to God's people described not just as the relationship of human lovers, partners, but also the relationship of parenting. As the prophet thinks of God's love towards Israel, he thinks of God like a parent teaching a child to walk, from the very beginning, nurturing, feeding, encouraging. And that process, every parent knows this, that process of investing yourself in the growth and the well-being of a child, that becomes so much part of you that you can't any longer think of yourself without that investment in and commitment to the child.

So, what I am suggesting about the book of Hosea is that behind it lies what must have been for the writer an extraordinary journey of mind and heart. The prophet is writing out of that sense of profound disappointment. I hoped for so much, I worked so hard, and it's come to nothing. That terrible experience has led him to think, well, that is how God is related to God's people. God hopes for so much, God invests so much, God is so deeply committed and yet it comes to nothing. The people of Israel turn their back on the truth of God, they make up gods for themselves, they accumulate the good things of this world, they perpetrate injustice and violence, they forget where they came from, and they forget who they are. So that's the second stage, the prophet's bitterness and resentment lead him to think, well, that's surely how God must look at the people of Israel. So much hoped for, so much promised, and such a deep disappointment. And then does the third stage, where the prophet recognizes -actually God doesn't feel disappointment and bitterness and resentment as we do, because the love that God gives to those God loves is not something that comes and goes, it is not something that God can live without, it just is God. How can I give you up? How can I stop loving, says God, without stopping being God? And that's the last stage of the learning, and perhaps as the book of Hosea more or less suggests, perhaps that's what leads Hosea to give his wife a second chance, to seek to restore what's been lost. Remember he gives his children those significant names "not my people", "not beloved". And as his understanding, his perception grows and matures, we hear again that those names must now be heard as: "You are my people, you are my beloved". And we can only hope, humanly speaking, that Hosea did indeed come to see his wife and his children as precious and loved again. Perhaps, though this is a very 21st century perspective on things, perhaps he came to see that Gomer, his wife, might also have felt betrayed and disappointed. Perhaps he came to see that she had a story as well. But that is to go well beyond the book that we have.

Now, I think that to read the prophecy of Hosea with some of those things in mind, helps us a little bit to make sense of what at first sight is a very strange passage right at the start of the book. We've heard how Hosea takes to himself an unfaithful wife who has children of unfaithfulness, as if Hosea can't believe that these children could really be his. And when Gomer, his wife, has her first child the Lord said to him: Name him Jezreel! For in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. Most of us who haven't been soaking ourselves in the history of the Old Testament for years will quite reasonably wonder what in earth is that about? But behind it lies a very dramatic and very tragic story. Jezreel is the place where, a couple of generations before Hosea, a successful revolution has taken place. The Rebel Chieftain Jehu has risen up in rebellion against the corrupt dynasty of the house of Ahab. He kills king Jehoram, he brings about the death of the queen mother Jezebel, he slaughters all the remaining members of the family of King Ahab, and he establishes a new kingdom which ironically turns out to be just as much affected by idolatry and injustice as the old one. Jezreel is the site of this great massacre that has been described. So the first of these children is called Jezreel, because the story of Jezreel for Hosea represents an episode of bitterness and disappointment. Those who supported the rebellion of Jehu must have believed this is the moment when at last we say goodbye to pagan idolatry, when at last we say goodbye to the corruption and the inhumanity of the reign of Aham and his family. Aham, remember, who not only compromises with the gods of Canaan, but is also responsible for a massive active injustice when he kills a neighbour in order to obtain his property. You can imagine, can't you? Young enthusiasts in the kingdom of Israel at the time saying: at last, we



have seen the back of that kind of violence, that kind of arrogance from the rich and wealthy, and that kind of irresponsible turning away from the truth of God to idolatry worship, the worship of what suits us. At last, all that is over. And yet within a few years all that is back again. It's a moment of extraordinary insight I think, when Hosea sees his own disappointed failing marriage, as a kind of symbol of the deep disappointments that happen in human history. People invest in revolutions and radical action; they perform acts of deep courage and great hope. They show a kind of love for the future, for the possibilities of justice and peace. And then reality lets them down. What seemed to be a successful revolution turns brutal and negative.

We don't have to look very far to see some of the analogies to that kind of experience. People have often written about what it must have felt like in the 1930s if you lived in Moscow in the darkest days of Stalin's purges. Imagine you've been an idealistic revolutionary in 1917, and that you just about manage to hang on to your confidence in the revolution through the years of the twenties, only to see everything being swallowed up in an insane murderous tyranny in the years of Stalin. We know that in that era many heroes of the revolution were arrested and accused of betraying revolution, and executed with only the most ridiculous pretence at a trial, and we know too that many of them resigned themselves to that terrible fate, because they must have felt, I don't know any longer what's true or what's worthwhile. I wonder too what it must have felt like for some of those who lived through the years of Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe. Thinking back once again, to a tyranny and unjust tyranny that had existed before, the irresponsible rule of a white elite of the black population -the moment of release and promise when at last an indigenous government takes over, and the gradual consolidation of anger and disappointment and doubt, as that new society falls apart and fails to realise what was hoped for. And indeed, just in the last few weeks we have seen how South Africa is still battling with its own demons. After the great transformation brought about by Nelson Mandela's presidency, gradually that revolution too went into the dark, became corrupt and oppressive. And in the all too long years of the presidency of Jacob Zuma people saw public institutions corrupted, public funds wasted, and a rising tide of violence and loss of respect for human life. Jacob Zuma now faces time in prison, but the wounds he inflicted on his country are still very deep. And for those who had stood alongside protesters and activists in the days of the struggle against apartheid, how very bitter, how very difficult that sense of betrayal and disappointment must have been and still is.

I am suggesting, then, that rather mysterious reference to Jezreel is a reminder of the disappointments that occur in public life as well as personal life. Hosea is seeing that the bitterness he feels in his private life is somehow part of the same family as the bitterness and disappointment that comes when the successful revolution goes wrong. When, to use an old image, the revolution eats its own children. Jezreel, a sign of disappointment, a sign of deep betrayal, false dawn, hopes denied. I was thinking in relation to Ezekiel yesterday; about prophecy as giving a doorway or a window into a vision of a world that is truly transformed. A completely different world, but yet a world which is still a transformation of what we know, what we are familiar with. Not just pushing aside who we are and what we are, but rebuilding and transfiguring it, from within. Prophecy always begins, as we have seen, with that deeply revolutionary conviction that things could be different. Public life does not have to be dominated by the unjust relations between rich and poor, it doesn't have to be dominated by the fact that the rich are not accountable to anyone. There is nothing in the law of nature which says some people must be more vulnerable than others because they have less power or money. There is nothing in the law of nature that says we are bound to prefer idols and fantasies of the true God. The prophet says, trust your hopes, trust that your hope for a different kind of world can be made real, because, says the prophet, that hope is grounded in an unchanging God, whose purpose and action are always working towards justice and reconciliation. That is what prophecy says, that is what it's there for, we have seen how it comes true, in Jeremiah and in Ezekiel.

But then, what if what actually happens isn't quite like that? What if what happens is more of the same, as if the wheel turns back towards the worst of the old world and we don't yet see the world made new? What if we are back with betrayal and violence, and loss? How do we manage that disappointment? So one of the things that needs to be in our minds as we read the prophecy of Hosea, is that universal human experience of disappointment. And the question is: How do we let ourselves manage that and make sense of that? Our first instinct will be bitterness and blame, and usually blame of others, just as Hosea, no doubt, blames his wife Gomer. There can be a blaze of hostility and fury and then depression. How right people are when they say depression is anger turned upon ourselves. And then beyond that first moment of anger lashing out, crying out in protest at others, pointing the finger at others, insulting and demeaning others. Perhaps that next moment of cynicism, and saying, well nothing will work, everything is corrupted. What is beyond that? If we allow God to take us one step further, what is beyond all that?

The prophecy of Hosea shows us how more and more unfolds, until we see that the last word is still as it always was, the utter freedom of love. Yes, our hopes are disappointed, yes what we longed to see has not yet happened, and perhaps it won't happen in our lifetime. But, does that mean that love has failed or gone away, or being denied? No, because God says: "How can I give you up?" God says in that very vivid image later in the book: "My deepest parts of the body, my intestines are rolling over with compassion and love. I am stirred to the depths of my body with love, as if God had a body. But the nearest image that the prophet can find is that churning up of our insides, as we feel in our own flesh and bones, the loss and the unhappiness and the confusion of others. God's love for us is as instinctive and as total as that. God's love doesn't depend on outcomes, we don't say, well, things haven't turned out very well there, no point in believing any longer. God's love remains, it's part of who and what God is. And of course that takes us back to all the things that we've already heard in Jeremiah and Ezekiel about how prophetic living, living in such a way that God's love and God's promise come through us, how that also is part of who we are and what we are. Not something we can drop in and out of, something we sometimes do, sometimes don't. Just as God's love is part of who God is, so our love and our prophetic witness are part of who we are. Remember Jeremiah saying: "When I try to hold all this in, and to be silent about it, it doesn't work. It hurts to hold it in." And doesn't that sound very like the word that Hosea puts into the mouth of God: "How can I give you up?" As if God is saying: "If I try not to love you –it hurts, I can't do it". The God who is presented here to us in this agonizing, difficult story of a human failure, a relationship which is broken, is a God who tells us more and more clearly that there is no way in which God can stop being what God is. And that means that the love that is offered and the reconciliation that is promised will always be there.

I have tried to describe the way in which in the book of Hosea there is a kind of arc, a kind of movement from the fear, bitterness of that first chapter and the third chapter too, to a very different tone that we find right at the end of the book: "I will heal their disloyalty", says God, "I will love them freely, my anger has turned away, I would be like the dew to Israel. He shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon". And, these extravagant promises: they shall flourish, they shall blossom, their fragrance should be like wine. This vision of abundance, the earth bearing its fruit, the people of God in the midst of a fruitful flowering earth, that's a vision which witnesses precisely to the freedom of God's love. Our disappointment isn't the end of the story. It isn't the end of the story in the way we think about our world and our future and our witness, it isn't the end of the story in our own lives either. I said earlier that most of us have a loss experience, of betraying and being betrayed. Many will understand the bitterness, the hostility, the honest blind resentment that can come when we feel we've been let down and disappointed, and yet, who God is doesn't change because of that. When the future is not what we had hoped for, God's future remains.



I spoke earlier of the ways that the Jewish rabbis write about the book of Hosea, and there are some of them who say Hosea began as a very severe prophet. A prophet who is known for the harshness of his words, the completeness of the judgment, the hostile judgement that he announced for God's people. And these rabbis say; Hosea was commanded by God to enter into a marriage that would fail, so that he would understand from within, what it meant that God could not stop loving.

It's a very typical rabbinical speculation you might say, not really anchored very deeply in the text, and yet at the same time telling us something enormously important about the message of the text. What if Hosea did indeed begin as a prophet of doom readily handing out sentences of destruction and annihilation, and God, as it were, says to him: You are going to experience in your own life and in your own relationships such deep vulnerability, such a sense of failure and of loss, that perhaps, says God, you will understand a little better what my own love must be like, and what your own love must be like. Yes, give voice to the sense of disappointment, let the bitter words come out, but don't stop there, don't stop learning, beyond that. In prophetic living lies the rediscovery of unchanging mercy. I will heal them, I will love them freely, they will blossom, they will flourish, their fragrance will be like wine. God's faithful love is God's very nature. If God stopped exercising faithful love, God would not be God. That's what we are learning, and so bit by bit, our very nature as human beings called into the kingdom of heaven, called into the new creation. Our very nature is going to be in some ways like that. We should discover like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Hosea, that we can't stop the love that feeds and flows out from our prophetic vision. Without stopping being human, without stopping being the people that we actually are, and that is the great challenge, as it's also the great promise of the prophetic voice. Hosea shows us someone being painfully, brutally honest about his own sense of disappointment and disillusion, his own anger, his own temptation towards cynicism writing off the whole thing, calling his children, "not my people, not beloved", turning inwards into negativity, and yet not quite able to forget the promise. Brought back gradually by God, to a recognition of what isn't lost and can't be lost. To the recognition of who God is and what God is, and so of who we are, and what we may be.

In all these reflections so far, on the prophets of Hebrew scripture, we have seen how thinking about our human experience takes us a bit closer into understanding the kind of God we are dealing with. And also, how the freshness and depth and sometimes the terrifying newness of the revelation of God, shows us more about what we as human beings are capable of. Finding out more about God and finding out more about ourselves seems to go hand in hand, as we think about prophetic living. And that's why, as we move on to the fourth of these reflections, we look at the one who is both a prophet and very much more than a prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. The one in whom learning about God and learning about humanity, really do stand together inseparable. Because when we look at Jesus, above all, we know that Jesus tells us what no one else can about God and tells us more than anyone else can about our own humanity. But we'll come back to that in the next and last of these reflections.

For now, let's remember as we read Hosea, all that Hosea has shown us about prophetic living, as a way of growing beyond, the bitterness of blame and the pain of disappointment. Prophetic living doesn't spare us from disillusion in the sense that our illusions are fancible hopes, are often taken away and denied by a harsh reality. But we are shown something of hope, we can live without illusion but also without despair. A lot of the time when we think about living without illusion, we may think that is the same as living cynically: No ideals really matter, no hopes will really be realised, who cares what the future holds, all I can do is try to keep myself safe and comfortable. But living without illusion doesn't need to take us there, because the one thing we can't have any illusions about in this perspective, in the prophetic perspective, is the nature of God. Our hopes, our fantasies

for the future, our illusions may come and go, and they will, and they do, but there is something, there is a truth about which we can't be disillusioned. If God is the God we say God is, God doesn't change. God's commitment is absolute, and so God's freedom to start over again is never destroyed, and never denied. By those episodes of disappointment and failure that we go through, we move beyond bitterness, cynicism, and pain. We live without illusion, but without despair. If we were to live today in South Africa, we might well say we have been disillusioned about the promise of the government of the African National Congress (ANC) over the decades. Disillusioned by the failure of the corruption of President Zuma, and yet we would also have to say, and we are not giving up, we are not accepting that corruption and tyranny unnatural. We know better. We know that in the presence of God, and in the eyes of God, things not only could be, but already are different. We know we must still be responsible to that vision. And still work for it to be real. And however small a way, however temporary a way, Hosea certainly makes us think about the darkness of our world, and the weakness of our efforts. And yet it's Hosea who gives us those radiant and unforgettable words, about how deep God's commitment is, how deep God's passion is for the world God has made, and the people God has called to be companions, lovers even.

So, once again, what are we going to be reflecting on as the day goes by? Well, probably it won't be too difficult for most of us to think of the personal and the political disappointments we've been through. All of us will have had moments of personal disillusion, and the sense of personal failure. Pretty well all of us will know something about failed relationships. Not as dramatically as Hosea perhaps but it is a rare human being who doesn't at some point feel lost or let down. But also, many of us will have been very active in the great causes of the day. Many of us will know what it is to put a huge amount of work and effort into what seems to be a lifegiving and promising political programme, a movement of reform, a movement of challenge, a movement of renewal. And then to find that it becomes sour or stale, or ineffective. We don't have to look too far for those experiences and perhaps today is a time just taking out some of those memories, thinking them through again. And asking what we've learned from them. But then there is a second thing to bear in mind as we reflect today. Yes, all of us, pretty well all of us, know something about being let down and letting other people down. Pretty well all of us know something about disappointment, public and private, but pretty well all of us also know something about the experience of restoration, and the experience of restoration when we have disappointed others. And yet, others have given us a second chance. So, I'd invite you today also to think with gratitude about those times in your lives when you have been welcomed back into a relationship or a community or a project. You may have felt you failed, and others will say, but that's not the end. We will work to restore this, we will work with you, and together make a difference. By the grace of God most/many of us will know something about what that means as well. We will know that when we have done less than we could or should, when we have walked away from someone, when we have shattered their hopes, broken their trust. So many of those who love us and who accompany us are still willing to be there for us and with us, so we can just give thanks once again for that.

Hosea is not an easy book to read. It's a book of pain and bitterness, of blame, grief, and loss. Jeremiah is open and eloquent about his own struggle when he knows the inadequacy of his words, to move anything or change anything. Ezekiel is forced to sit in silence, to be overwhelmed by experiences he can't cope with, and then struggle to find words that are fresh enough or new enough, to express what he has seen. Hosea takes us right into the heart of human disillusion and the sense that perhaps it doesn't matter after all, and shows us bit by bit how God may restore in us the prophetic hope, the prophetic confidence in God's own unchangingness. And so, as we conclude for today, let's just listen once again to some of those words towards the end of Hosea, that bring this home to us.



Here from chapter eleven: *It was I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up in my arms, but they did not know that I healed them, I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love, I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks, I bent down to them and fed them. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, o Israel? My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender, I will not execute my fierceness of my anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and no mortal. The Holy One in your midst... I will heal their disloyalty, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel, he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike roots like the forests of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out, his beauty should be like the olive tree and his fragrance like that in Lebanon. They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden, they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance should be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols, it is I who answer and look after you.*



## Bibeltime Korsvei 2021, Prophetic Living, Rowan Williams, Jesus Lørdag 24/7:

Of course, we as Christians think of Jesus as more than just a prophet. A Jew or a Muslim might very well regard Jesus with deep respect, even love, as part of a prophetic tradition. We can't help but think of Jesus as more than that. But let's not forget that Jesus is at least that, and that fact itself helps us to talk with our Jewish and Muslim friends. Prophet is a title that's given to Jesus in his lifetime, it's the way he is thought of by a great many of his contemporaries. And so it makes sense for us to think what it is for him to be a prophet. You can even say that the whole of his mission makes sense only in the light of this identity and this calling as a prophet. Like the prophets of Hebrew scripture, he calls his people to be truly what God wants them to be. He calls them to live in deep dependence on God's mercy and God's hope. He pleads with them to become a community that is held together by trust in God's calling. And because it's held together by trust in God's calling, it can't be divided by differences in race and status and achievement, and all the rest of it.

As we read the gospels, it's impossible to avoid the conclusion that Jesus is pleading with Israel to be itself, to be what it's meant to be, to be what all the prophets believed it should be. To be a community which in the whole of its life spoke of the mercy and the justice of God to the entire world. A community, in which time after time people discovered that what most deeply mattered, what was deeply made the difference, was a conviction in the absolute unshakeable, consistent mercy and gift of God. And so it's a community in which there is always the offer and the promise of welcome, of homecoming.

Jesus speaks about this reality in his actions and in his words. In his actions we know he exercises what you might almost call a reckless hospitality towards people who are forgotten or despised by others. In his words, not least in his parables, he gives us images and metaphors, stories about the new world in which unexpected welcome and homecoming, unexpected discovery and enrichment thread through all the stories. But most importantly of all, Jesus makes his entire life a kind of prophetic sign. We read very often in the prophets of Hebrew scripture about prophetic signs. The fact that the prophets sometimes give their children symbolic names is part of this. But we also read of prophetic actions by Hosea and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Actions which express to those around what God is doing. They may be strange actions, they may be very challenging actions, some people may think that the actions are of the insane. But these acts, like Isaiah walking naked through the streets, Jeremiah bearing the loin cloth, are the sign of trust in the future. They are also of the corruption and the fragility of the people of Israel, all of these things speak of how the prophets make their very actions, their very bodies a symbol of what God wants to do. But in the stories of the prophets these are isolated actions.

What we see in the life of Jesus is a Jesus that seeks to make the whole of his identity, the whole of his being, a sign or a symbol of God's faithfulness. When Jesus the night before his arrest breaks bread and pours out wine for his disciples and says: "This is my body, this is my blood", he is saying: "All that I am has become a sign of the God who is with you and will never walk away from you". And when you share this bread and wine, that is what you will know in your own flesh and blood. The God who does not walk away, the God who is prepared to be so helpless in your hands, as to make himself food for you, to give you all that God is. So, what is different about Jesus as prophet is that the prophetic signs and acts which the earlier prophets perform, somehow take over the whole of Jesus' life right up to his death. It becomes a sign and a symbol. All that he conveys the spirit of God, that spirit which is, as St Paul says - the pledge, the assurance of a future that God wants to bring about. And so when Jesus shares his spirit with us, his friends, his followers, he is sharing with us the possibility, a rather strange and alarming possibility, that our lives too may become a sign.



That our flesh and blood will speak of what kind of god God is to the world, and will invite others into that mystery.

I have spoken a bit about how this connects with the language of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus. And St. Luke in his gospel is consistently very deeply interested in the Spirit. From the very beginning of the gospel the Spirit is seemed to be at work. It's the Spirit who descends upon Mary in Nazareth, it's the Spirit who opens the mouth of Zechariah who has not been able to speak so that he can praise God. It's the Spirit that leads Simeon into the temple to recognize the child Jesus as Saviour and Messiah. And so it is the same Spirit who is manifested at the baptism of Jesus and then leads Jesus into the desert. And according to the beginning of chapter 4 of Luke's gospel it is the same Spirit that takes Jesus back to his home territory. It is the same Spirit that opens his mouth in the synagogue of his hometown -to teach those around him about the new creation.

Part of what's going on here it seems, is that Luke like the other evangelists is telling us that when Jesus goes out into the desert, it's really Jesus going through the whole history of God's people again. God's people were led out of slavery but they spent long years in the desert, wandering and wandering, wandering and questioning, wandering and sometimes rebelling. God is with them every step of the way, in the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud. And yet the people don't always understand what this means. But in that long experience of wandering and questioning, they finally come to the point where Moses goes up to Mount Sinai, encounters God on their behalf. And brings back from the hand of God the vision of a society that lives in justice and in mercy. So Jesus goes out into the desert like the people of God so that the story may begin all over again. So that God's people may learn all over again who they are to be, what they are called to be, Jesus spends 40 days and 40 nights in the desert, as the people of Israel spent 40 years wandering.

And then he comes home, he comes to the place where he was brought up. And there could be no stronger communication, no stronger words to tell us that Jesus is gathering up the memory of his people, the identity of his own people. He is going to where he can speak from the very heart of his people's experience and history. He goes to his home where he has learned all he knows about God, humanly speaking. And he goes to the synagogue where people gather to affirm that history, and that's where he speaks -from the very centre of God's work in the history of Israel. He goes to where he was brought up, and he speaks out of the tradition of his people. And remember that in Luke's gospel, what Jesus says in the synagogue is his first great public utterance. So far in Luke's gospel we've heard him speaking to the temptations of the devil in the desert, but we haven't yet heard him speaking to God's people. And the first thing he says is the reading from the prophet Isaiah and his own words that follow: "Today this scripture is fulfilled, is made real, in your eyes, in your sight". So, Luke has planned this very carefully. The Spirit has been at work in the early chapters of Luke's gospel, the Spirit which has brought Jesus into the womb of Mary, which has already begun the process of the recognition of Jesus by those around him. The Spirit now opens his mouth in Nazareth at the synagogue so that Jesus may declare authoritatively to his own people, his own tradition what the Spirit now asks of them. What kind of community is this community of the Spirit going to be?

So, we turn to what actually is said in that enormously powerful moving reading from scripture in the synagogue at Nazareth. Some modern interpreters have called this the Nazareth Manifesto, like the program of a political party. If you want to know what the community of the Spirit would look like, this is where to begin. And we could say, if we want to know what the Spirit of God sounds like, what sort of thing the Spirit of God does in our midst, this is a good place to start. Three things perhaps: The Spirit announces, the Spirit releases and the Spirit enlightens. Jesus makes his own words of the prophet as Isaiah records them: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me". Literally, he has made me Christ, because Christ means the anointed. He has made me Christ; he has anointed me to announce good news to the poor. So, the first mark of the Spirit's work is that something is made known, made public, which is a source of good news, of hope to the poor. And the poor in this

context are not just of course the economically poor, because in the Bible the word so often simply means those who have nowhere to turn but God. Those who don't depend and can't depend on anything or anyone but God. So, good news for the poor is saying to those who can only depend on God, you are not wrong to depend on God. Your hope in God, your dependence on God is not a fantasy, not an illusion. This is actually contact with reality.

So Jesus, filled with the Spirit anointed for his task, begins by saying to those who depend not on themselves, but on God: "You are living in the truth". This is how it is, and our future and our well-being will come to pass when we understand more deeply and live out more fully that hope in God, not in our own capacity, our own success, but in the faithful love of God. The Spirit announces and the Spirit tells what God has done and is doing – so as to give hope. That hope, that firm conviction given to the poor, to the dependent, to those who have no power to control the circumstances of their lives and who have to turn to God, the Spirit's work there - is telling them the truth, that there is something to depend on, something that can be relied on, God's faithful love! So, the Spirit is on Christ so that he may preach, proclaim, announce the good news, and then announce release to the captives. The Spirit announces and the Spirit releases. When we grasp the fact that God's mercy is faithful, that God's love is indestructible – what happens is release. We spend so much of our time and energy seeking to justify, to save ourselves, to put ourselves right, to heal ourselves. It seems we are too afraid to look to others to speak love to us and work healing for us. But when we are told, as Jesus tells us here, when we are told that there is a faithful God, when we are confronted with a life like that of Jesus which embodies, which fleshes out the reality of that infinite and eternal love, we may very well hear the words that so often echo in the gospel: "Don't be afraid, don't panic and surround yourself with defences and strategies to keep yourself safe. Trust in the God who has called you and who has committed to you. And then you will be set free, released from the tyranny of having to save yourself, justify yourself, make yourself right".

There is a wonderful phrase in one of the stories about the early desert fathers of the monastic communities in Egypt, who said that you had to lay down the heavy burden of self-justification. Jesus says that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. And he is telling us there that the heaviest burdens are the ones we lay upon ourselves. The burden, the pressure of trying to prove that we are right and make sure that we are safe. Put down those heavy loads, and you'll find release, you'll find freedom. So, when Jesus in the power of the Spirit announces release, freedom for the captives, for those in prison, he is saying: "Here is a word which will deliver you from all the things that hold you back, from being loved and welcomed by God, as you should be".

In yesterday's question session you may remember we were talking a bit about the nature of sin, and thanks to a very insightful question I was able to suggest that one of the ways in which we might think of sin is that it's all those things that stop us accepting the love of God. Sin is not something that prevents God from loving, because nothing can do that. Sin is what stops us hearing the word of mercy and love from God. Sin is bound up so deeply with our own anxious, fearful compulsion to try and make everything right for ourselves. So, the Spirit makes known and the Spirit sets free and the Spirit opens the eyes of those who can't see.

The Spirit gives us new vision, new sight. That great and ancient hymn to the Holy Spirit which we sing at Pentecost, in which we in the Anglican tradition always sing at confirmation and ordination: "Come Holy Ghost Our Souls Inspire" (Veni Creator Spiritus), that's a hymn which more than once reminds us that the Spirit opens our eyes, the Spirit gives us new light. So, the Spirit does not only announce and release, the Spirit enables us to see with clarity. Of course, that is an idea which has its parallels in the gospel of St. John, in the words that Jesus speaks at the last supper to his disciples in the farewell discourses in St. John's gospel. What is coming, said Jesus, is the Spirit of truth who will tell us the truth about what sin and righteousness really are. So that Spirit of truth opens our eyes, opens our eyes to see what we have forgotten or overlooked, opens our eyes to see what the world



around us forgets and overlooks as well. Life in the Spirit is a life that notices what is within us and around us. So, to live in the Spirit is to be able to look at ourselves more honestly. Not to be panicked or afraid when we see in ourselves the compulsions and the selfishness and the fantasy that all human beings seem to live with. The Spirit gives us the strength and the courage to look at that, because the Spirit says: "God sees all that, God knows all that, and yet God does not turn away. So you can see it, you can know it, and you don't have to turn away either -in shame or guilt. Look at it, be honest about it, bring it into the light and let the truth of God dissolve it or heal it. So, we learn to see ourselves a bit more clearly. The Spirit helps us repent, it's as simple as that. The Spirit shows us what needs healing in us, and of course it is a life-time job, it doesn't all happen at once. But then the Spirit opens our eyes, our blinded eyes to what is around us, the Spirit makes our eye-sight sharp enough, and keen enough to see where the world around us is failing deeply. And so, to see what the world around us refuses us to see.

It is perhaps most characteristic of Christian and prophetic witness, prophetic living, to see the suffering of lives the world in general doesn't care about. Whether it's in Francis of Assisi embracing those with leprosy in his own time, whether in our own day it is those people who advocate and risk and struggle on behalf of forgotten and endangered communities, some of those courageous people in the 19th century in the African missions who resisted the slave trade, those in our own time who have resisted modern slavery and injustice. Figures like the great Catholic laywoman in America, Dorothy Day, who created what she called Houses of Hospitality for the homeless and the forgotten in the cities of North America. The Christian is there to notice the people that others pass by, to notice and to remember those so easily forgotten.

But the Spirit also opens our eyes in a third and crucial way, which we have already heard a lot about, the Spirit opens our eyes to God. The Spirit, therefore, you could say, mounts a great attack on all our fictions and falseness about God, about the God who is really just an enlarged image of who we are, the God who reproduces all our ideas and our prejudices, and even all our fears, absurdly, as if God had to be protected from what threatens God. The Spirit opens our eyes to God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the God whose very essence and identity as we saw with Hosea, is to be merciful and be faithful, the God who can't stop being faithful without stopping being God. That's the God that the Spirit unfolds to us, that's the God the Spirit itself, herself, himself actually is.

So the summary in these verses of the work of the Spirit tells us all kinds of profoundly significant things about life in the Spirit and prophetic living. All of these are tests and we talked a bit in the discussion periods about how we test the truth of prophecy. All these are tests for authentic prophetic living. Is the life that we are seeking to live, a life that makes known who God is and what God has done, a life which speaks to those who are struggling, lost, wandering and tells them: "Your hope is not in vain, your trust is not an illusion". Prophetic life says that. All that you hope for, for healing and reconciliation, is grounded in the eternal truth of God. It's not just a warm and comforting human idea, it rests on the deepest truth that there is. And prophetic living is truly itself when it is somehow conveyed to all those around, that these hopes for justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal are grounded in the real. And we can say, that this prophetic living is authentic and true when it releases people, releases them from fear of an arbitrary or hostile God. A God that demands what we can never give, or releases us from a God who is so like us, who echoes our own views and prejudices, that we are never going to let the true God in if we stick with such a fiction.

Prophetic living dismantles false pictures of God, limited and limiting pictures, and opens the door to the true God who is eternal faithfulness. And when we see that and help others see it, something is released in us and for us. A burden is lifted. We no longer have to save ourselves, love ourselves into life, prove ourselves to be in the right, God is there, holding us, feeding us, leading us to grow. And true prophetic living provides true and fresh vision. It allows us to see ourselves both more fully and

repentantly but also more compassionately. It allows us to see what the world often doesn't want us to see, in terms of suffering and injustice. And prophetic living, once again, makes known who God is, allows us to see the glory that surrounds us, and the promise that feeds us and sustains us. "Today," says Jesus, "this scripture is fulfilled in your presence", and what he means by that surely is that all of these marks of the presence of God's Spirit are here and now in his own presence, his own flesh and blood. "Here I am", says Jesus, "here I am to announce to you, to embody for you who God is. Here I am to set you free. To tell you not to be afraid, to step out towards God who made you and loves you -in trust. And I am here" said Jesus "to open your eyes". Not to tell you that everything is all right, but to say you may look with honesty at your sins and your failures, because God looks at them already, with pity, and not with blame.

As that great writer of the English Middle Ages, whom I quoted yesterday Julian of Norwich puts it, Jesus makes this great claim in the synagogue, that the words of prophecy are now real, because he is there, he is living out the call and the gift of God's Spirit. And that is the Spirit that he breathes into us and shares with us. "Into your hands I commend my Spirit", says Jesus on the cross. He breathes his last, he breathes his own breath, his own deep life reality into the hands of his Father. But in St Luke's overall story that life which is breathed out to God the Father is breathed again back to the world, we breathe it in, as the Spirit comes on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and the community of the Spirit, which we are, is created. And so, our living in the Spirit, our prophetic living, takes on the same colouring as what Jesus is talking about in these unforgettable words in the synagogue.

We test the reality and authenticity of our life in the Spirit by these things: Are we making known who God is? Are we setting people free? Are we opening people's eyes? Are we broadening the world people live in? Because that is really what it comes down to. So many human beings live in a world that is so much smaller than reality. And we as Christians who have breathed in the Spirit of God, we are those who've been given the chance of living in a greater world, and that's the world into which we have to try to draw all those around us, a world where there is assurance and trust. For those who can only depend on God, a world in which people are released from their terrors and anxieties and fantasies, a world in which no human suffering goes unseen, no human person is forgotten.

We've been thinking together in the last few days about all the different aspects of the prophetic calling that we see in some of the great figures of Hebrew scripture. And today I have been trying to connect those a bit with Jesus' own first great prophetic action and prophetic word in the synagogue at Nazareth. We've been thinking about the way in which the liberating, illuminating word of God becomes so much part of us that we just can't deny it, we can't hold it in, like Jeremiah. We've been thinking about the way in which the word of God within us keeps us deeply attentive, to the mystery even, we could say, the terror of what's around us. Like Ezekiel sitting among the exiles in silence, struggling to find words that are new enough or real enough to address their condition. We've spent time with Hosea, painfully working through his own anger, his own sense of loss and disillusion, and discovering in the heart of all that, a God who never walks away. And a God who cannot stop loving without stopping being God. It all comes together here -in the synagogue at Nazareth, it comes together as Jesus says: "I am here to be for you the word of liberation, a sign of the new creation. All that I am and say is a communication in the Spirit from the God who wants you to know the truth". But knowing the truth is not just knowing with your brain, it's knowing in your flesh and blood, knowing from the very heart of your being, that you are called and embraced by this mystery and that it lives within you and works within you and speaks within you. And in all this your life will become an illumination, a sign, a moment of enlightenment for those around.

We've been saying in the discussion period that the whole community is in some sense called to live prophetically. Some people live it out more dramatically than others, because there are many ways



of living out the common gifts of the Spirit. But what Jesus is saying to us in his proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth is surely that the Church, his body, his community is there just as he is, to announce and release and enlighten, and the Church can't stop doing those things without stopping being the Church. Goodness knows we have tried hard enough to stop, and there have been periods and there have been places where it looks as we have almost stopped completely, and yet we never have, because God is God and the Spirit is still given. And that is our hope and our joy. But one of the things which the Church always needs, is the fellowship, the communion, the honest exchange and conversation, in which Christian disciples, friends of Jesus, are able to say to one another: "How are you managing, succeeding, if at all, in living out this three-fold vocation. How are you managing to proclaim and release and enlighten?" Because, I say to my Christian friends, I am not doing very well, I would like to learn from you, and maybe, who knows, there are things you can learn from me? But together we need to listen and discover how better, how more fully to proclaim and release and enlighten. To announce that God is to be trusted, to release people from what prevents them from accepting love, to enlighten them, to give them the capacity to see what perhaps they would rather forget, but which God still embraces. So, within the Church these are the challenges and questions we put to one another. And that of course is why a network like Korsvei is so very important. It exists like all groups and networks and religious orders and what have you in the Church, so that the experience of the Church may not just be that of regular collective worship, vital as that is, but an experience in which that worship and the insight coming from it is shared at the human and the personal level.

And so, perhaps, in concluding these thoughts, our reflection for today might be very simply, looking back and finding some of the memories of when things have been made known to us, when we have felt released, when we have felt able to see ourselves more honestly and more compassionately, by the grace of God. I doubt whether many of us would be here or involved in Korsvei or anything else in the Church unless there were moments and persons that made that real for us. Moments we could look back on and say, well there I saw something of the future, something of the kingdom, there I saw what I hadn't seen before, and I am grateful. And in all this, looking back with grateful memory, looking forward in hope, we give thanks above all, for the gift of the one who spoke those words, in the Synagogue of Nazareth. The one who is a prophet and more than a prophet. The one in whose historical earthly body scripture was fulfilled, the promise of Hebrew prophecy made real, and whose death and resurrection, the spirit of prophecy and of joyful renewal is breathed out upon us -to transform our life and our hope.