

2021 01 31 – Love Raises Up Prophets

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 & Mark 1:21-28 (The Inclusive Bible)

A week and a half ago many of us sat transfixed in front of our screens watching as Joe Biden became the 46th president of the United States. We watched as he took the oath of office, as he spoke his inaugural speech, as famous singers sang familiar songs and preachers prayed. And then we watched as a young black woman in a bright yellow coat stood at the podium and recited a poem she had written for the occasion, a poem she called “The Hill We Climb.”

Her name is Amanda Gorman and she is the first National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States. Most of us had no idea who she was before that moment. Now people all around the world know her name and are calling her a beacon of hope. The Arts Editor for BBC News said:

Amanda Gorman delivered her piece with grace,
the words it contained will resonate with people the world over:
today, tomorrow, and far into the future.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-55738564>

Her, yet unpublished, books are each expected to have a first printing of one million copies. She has also been asked to recite an original poem before the Super Bowl next Sunday. At twenty-two years of age, Amanda Gorman has become a voice of hope and truth for the United States and even for the world; she has become a prophet for this time and this place.

Who knows, maybe Jesus would have had the same instant fame if he had lived in the 21st century. The Gospel of Mark tells us that when Jesus and his newly-

appointed disciples, arrived in Capernaum, they went to the synagogue and there Jesus began to teach. This was the very beginning of his ministry and, even then, “the people were spellbound” by his teaching. The author explains that “Jesus taught with an authority that was unlike their [own] religious scholars.”

Where does this authority come from? What was it about Jesus’ teaching that had people spellbound? What is it about Amanda Gorman that has caught the imagination of the world? Why did people come in the thousands to hear Jesus’s teach and why are millions of people ready to buy Amanda’s books of poetry?

Well, the first thing we know is that both have a way with words. Jesus knew how to tell a story and so does Amanda. In fact, there’s a three-year old video of her on YouTube telling a funny and poignant story about the time that she unsuccessfully auditioned for the Broadway version of *The Lion King* ([watch video](#)). Certainly the ability to use words well can help to give someone authority in the eyes and ears of others.

Another thing that both Jesus and Amanda have in common is that they speak the hard truth of their times. Jesus lived in first century Galilee at a time when Roman rulers overtaxed and oppressed the Jewish people. Jesus’ stories, his parables, were about oppressive landlords, unfair wages and people living in poverty. Amanda grew up in a single parent household and knows firsthand the problem of racism in our North American culture. Her poetry focusses on issues

of oppression, racism, and marginalization. Her inaugural poem begins with these challenging words:

When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade

We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy
And this effort very nearly succeeded
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/politics/amanda-gorman-inaugural-poem-transcript/index.html>

But even as they named the issues of the day, both of these prophets also shared a message of better times to come. Jesus talked about the kingdom or reign of God. A time that had begun but was not yet fully present, a time of peace and justice for all. Amanda's poem was also filled with messages of hope.

She wrote:

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious
Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division

Yes, authority comes from the speaking of truth in the face of injustice. It comes from the preaching of hope in a time of despair. But even more than that it comes from a place deep within. It comes from a presence, an aura that cannot be faked. We know that Jesus' authority came from the Divine, the Holy Spirit, the Power of Love within him. And Jesus demonstrated that power through his ability to heal. In today's reading we heard how he could change a person's life by removing the unclean spirit, the disease, the malaise that kept that person from being what they were meant to be.

I'm not suggesting that Amanda Gorman has the ability to perform healing miracles. But I do believe that she has been given a gift by God and that her words come from a sacred place within her. Her aura, her authentic presence leapt through the screen as she stood on the balcony of the U.S. Capitol and recited her poem. She is not just a poet, but also an activist whose words have the ability to both heal and inspire.

In Deuteronomy, we hear Moses, another ancient prophet, speaking the words of God, of YHWH, to the Israelite people, saying,

I will raise up for them a prophet like you among their people,
into whose mouth I will put my words,
and that person will tell them all that I command.

Some Christians might argue that Moses was talking about Jesus, but all we have to do is look at the Hebrew Scriptures to know that there were many prophets that came before Jesus' time and, of course, there have been many since.

Prophets come in all shapes and sizes. They come in all races and ethnicities. They come in all religions and cultures. It is up to us to determine who we listen to and whose words will impact our actions. It is up to us to recognize that no matter what others are saying we have to follow that still small voice within us. It is our intuition, our gut reaction, our connection to the sacred that will tell you and me which prophet is speaking God's truth to us.

And when we hear that truth it is up to us to share it in our words and our actions. We probably won't be selling millions of books or reciting our poetry to a world-wide audience. But we need to remember that Jesus began his ministry by impacting people's lives, one person at a time. That's all we are called to do, that's all we can hope to do.

Amanda Gorman ended her poem with a call to action. She said:

When day comes we step out of the shade,
afame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it