

The Tears of Things

Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage

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Spring 2025

I. Introduction: Good Trouble

1. Morality 101 and the Prophets - Purity Codes vs The Spirit of the Law. "Truth without love is not transformational truth; truth from a cruel heart undoes its message."
 - Richard Rohr. We open the book by learning about a time in the history of God's people when purity codes and performance had replaced the spirit of God's law. There was a deep need for someone to call the people to return to God and to justice ... to reveal the heart of God. The prophets continued for hundreds of years from 1300 B.C. through Israel's kingdom, exile and conquest. Samuel, Amos, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They were officially-licensed culture critics. According to Rohr, the prophets were much more central to Gospel than even they realized.
 - What had you learned before now about the prophets... not so much about what they wrote, but about their background and the context in which they wrote? Had you thought about prophets as speaking to the collective as opposed to the individual (like John the Baptist)? How are we making that same mistake now (the individual as compared to the collective)?
 - Can you think of modern examples of individuals in churches and religious communities who are more interested in seeking power or retaining power or preserving their own positions than seeking justice? What about in other spheres, like politics, education or other professions? Are there any prophets calling them out? Who are they?
 - Do you agree that it's not possible to understand Jesus without understanding the prophets? In what ways has this led to our current dilemma in politics? Do you see a new order forming as Rohr alludes to? Or have you noticed a new movement toward "good trouble"?
2. Critical Thinking and Group Narcissism. Rohr says that when we lose the prophetic analysis, "most evil will be denied, disguised or hidden among the rules and rituals of religion and the law itself". Cleaning up behavior is different from true purification ... because in it the identity and adulation of the group becomes more important than the truth the group initially seeks to vindicate. As Rohr puts it, egos validated by religion "are given full permission to enslave, segregate, demean, defraud and inflate".
 - What is your experience with and understanding of group narcissism? Have you seen it in religious organizations that you have been a part of? What about political or educational institutions?

- This is of no surprise to the prophets according to Rohr... had you thought about the prophets in this way before ... as calling out group narcissism? The prophets call out superiority complexes, judgmentalism, etc. ... and call us to forgiveness, patience, love, etc? In what ways have you made things that are not absolute, infinite or objectively good into “gods” ... what about what you have seen in others?
 - Had you known that most of the prophets were murdered? Had you thought of them as scapegoats, as Rohr alludes to? What about Rene Gerard’s observation of the unique aspect of the Bible’s ability to recognize the universal human avoidance of our own dark side? Or scapegoating?
3. Perceived Innocence vs Solidarity with Suffering. According to Gerard, the writer of the book of John describes the universal sin of the world as the tendency to seek to attain our innocence instead of acting in solidarity with suffering and sinners.
- How to move forward from here? What are some examples of those we have sacrificed for our own innocence? Immigrants at the border? Indigenous people during manifest destiny? Black people in the eras of slavery and lynching? LGBTQ people in the era of purity culture? In what ways does our obsession with individual vindication allow us to avoid taking responsibility for collective oppression?
 - According to Paul, we are no longer held captive to old written code; in Jesus we are free in the new life of the spirit. Law is not an end unto itself, but a boundary to the inflated human ego and a protector of the human good. In what ways have you tended to make others your own scapegoat? In what ways is this hurting only you? In what ways does it hurt others? In what ways has this prevented the Spirit of God from being freed to work in our lives?
 - How should we think about these concepts from a collective perspective as compared to the individual perspective? What are your golden calves? What are our collective golden calves?
4. Learning to be Loved and to Love as God Loves. Rohr discusses how being a part of a human system can stifle our ability to experience and express the truth of God’s love. He even goes as far as to suggest that he is incapable of exploring the path of the prophet from a woman’s perspective... I imagine this means he isn’t capable of doing so from other perspectives as well.
- In what ways do our biases prevent us from experiencing the fullness of God’s love? In what ways do our open and curious relationships with those who are different from us allow us to get closer to that?
 - How do we see things from a perspective of infinite love as opposed to debasing or devaluing something else for the sake of our own innocence? Is that really one of the key points of the Cross... to free us from that burden? Had you heard about the Buddhist practices of lens-wiping and ego-spotting ... to remove delusions and bad habits of mind ... to defeat the imperial ego?

- Do you agree that we need to be bathed in “infinite love” in order to be free to risk ego deflation? In what ways have you experienced that? Did the prophets walk with you on that journey? What do you think Rohr meant in the podcast when he noted that the prophets “eventually” understand infinite love?
 - In what ways does receiving God’s love allow us to receive infinity? The mustard seed? Moving mountains? Have you thought of faith in these contexts as something you were supposed to receive or be bathed in as opposed to something you are supposed to do?
 - How does our vulnerability, our pain, our wounding lead us to true faith? How do we engage in the discernment to know when to use non-dual and dual thinking? What about the idea of reading scripture seeking “finality” as opposed to using it as a recipe for development? “When we lack self-knowledge, we will unconsciously project our disliked and unknown self onto others ... condemning them for the very faults we share.”
5. Both/And Thinking: Ok and Not Ok”. In the podcast, Rohr refers to the poem **“For When People Ask”** by Rosemary Wahtola Trommer.

*I want a word that means
okay and not okay,
more than that: a word that means
devastated and stunned with joy.
I want the word that says
I feel it all all at once.
The heart is not like a songbird
singing only one note at a time,
more like a Tuvan throat singer
able to sing both a drone
and simultaneously
two or three harmonics high above it—
a sound, the Tuvans say,
that gives the impression
of wind swirling among rocks.
The heart understands swirl,
how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,
blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,*

this world so ripe with joy.