

Amos 2: 4 – end; Ephesians 4: 17 – end

**'Prophetic Voices'**

**Introduction ...**

There were verses in each of our readings tonight that stood out to me as being linked.

In **Amos 2 verse 11** God says: **And I raised up some of your children to be prophets**

then in the next verse: **But you commanded the prophets saying 'you shall not prophesy'**

From **Ephesians 4 verse 30: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit'** ... Linked to Amos, as it is God's Spirit who inspires the prophets.

**Who is a prophet** – or when is someone speaking with a prophetic voice?

A prophetic voice –

- speaking God's words, inspired by the Spirit
- often speaking to God's people ... then sometimes to national leaders
- pointing out something that is 'of God' but that the majority often doesn't want to hear, never mind acknowledge as true.

I want to give an example ... though with some trepidation as I could be seen as 'blowing my own trumpet' – which isn't my aim.

**General Synod ...**

From 2000 to 2009, I was an elected member of General Synod.

General Synod has many working parties – which are meant to have a diverse membership.

Being female, clergy and from the Northern Province ... I found myself asked to be on quite a few. If I'd been black – I suspect there would have been even more requests!

And so I was a member of a group producing the draft of the first ever "Guidelines for the professional conduct of the Clergy."

It was quite clear to me that the draft that we came up with had a major internal contradiction.

In one place, the clergy were told that they had to report any allegation about or admission of child abuse ... yet in another place the guidelines stated that the "Seal of the confessional" remained in place. In other words, anything said during individual confession was not to be passed on.

In the working group, I spoke against this 'absolute seal' ... but was shouted down (literally) by those who held a different view. In the group, I was a lone voice.

I spoke against it within General Synod in full session ... a few more were in support, but no change was voted through ... the majority voted against it.

Twenty years on ... following very serious reports of the church turning a blind eye so often to known child abuse ... twenty years or more on .... the House of Bishops last year commissioned work on whether or not the Seal of the Confession should remain in these circumstances.

**For us ...**

How might insights from this be important in this place, at this time?

Well – majority decisions

majority views

are not necessarily or always of God.

There must be room for and attention paid to the 'lone' or 'minority' voice – remember to consider seriously, to discern prayerfully – if this voice is of God, is truly prophetic, that to ignore it would be to grieve the Spirit.

One recent example:

There was a congregational survey undertaken at the end of last year. There will be a summary of the findings in the Magazine that will be out next weekend.

The easiest way to treat the survey is to look for what the majority of people are saying ...that can be a good approach – sometimes consensus is a sign of the Holy Spirit at work.

But Jane Rylands made an important comment – that we shouldn't automatically ignore a view just because only one person expressed it. She's right ... this could be a prophetic comment.

The PCC's – or others – making decisions need to discern prayerfully if this 'lone voice' comes from a 'personal bee in the bonnet' ... or if that person is actually expressing 'a bee in the bonnet of God'!

**Amen.**