



*"...The heart of the sons of men
is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart
while they live..."
(Ecclesiastes 9:3)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before the high God?
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the LORD require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God?
(Micah 6:6, 8)*

a homily on just society and our mad state of rebellion

healing our brokenness inadequately (part 1):

Customers as prey—cpap's, ventilators, and mammon

*"They heal my people's brokenness inadequately, asserting:
'It's OK! It's OK!'
But nothing is OK!" (Jeremiah 6:14, author's translation).*

Introduction

Judicial inequality and injustice. Economic inequality and injustice. Rampant greed and fraud on the part of wealthy individuals and essential institutions. Bribery and corruption of government officials. Inordinate influence of the wealthy of laws and public policy. Unjust laws and policies favoring the powerful and influential while disadvantaging the less powerful and influential. The infliction of the vulnerable with hunger, homelessness, sickness, and anxiety. Self-righteous justification of the mad state of rebellion. Stubborn refusal to acknowledge these and a host of other societal ills.

No, I am not talking about America of 2024. However, if the shoe fits...

I am talking about late 6th and early 5th century B.C. Judah. These, and many other evils undermined the temporal, moral, and spiritual health of the nation. All the signs were there.

The nation was on the verge of collapse. It was in desperate need of truth, however sour it might be to the national palate. But the nation's shepherds fed the populace an empty diet of propagandistic myths of nationalism. Many of Israel's prophets joined the fray. Israel's watchmen, Jeremiah charged,

“Heal my people's brokenness inadequately, asserting:
‘It's OK! It's OK!’”

“But nothing,” Jeremiah replies, “is OK!”

Does this, too, sound familiar? Strike close to home? It should. Too often, today's religious leaders—whether they go by the name, “prophet,” “priest,” or “pastor”— seem to lack both discernment and courage. They seem utterly blind to and mute about sin and evil, unless, of course, it involves some form of real or imagined sexual deviance. If they do speak out, it is often with muted, vague, delicate, and generalized voices and statements. These shepherds seem not up to the challenging task of bold and clear truth telling of the sort that our society so desperately needs. Now is not the time for delicacy and caution.

This homily is the first in an ongoing series entitled, “Healing Our Brokenness Inadequately,” based on Jeremiah 6.¹⁴. In this series, we explore specific examples of individual and societal sins about which political and religious leaders all too often remain willfully blind or, if sighted, stubbornly mute... and therefore complicit. Tragically, sometimes their complicity is even active and enthusiastic. With these examples in mind, we will often call upon the classic Hebrew prophets as well as other ancient and not so ancient prophets to speak as if from the dust. We read these discerning writings in light of the societal ills and injustices that abound in our modern world. Sometimes we even imagine and take a stab at replicating what a Hebrew prophet might have to say if he were to come to us from the past.

In today's homily, we offer an example of our brokenness about which too many remain silent and worse, in which too many engage themselves. Such moments as ours desperately

cry out for the type of discernment, boldness, and truth-telling so characteristic of the Hebrew prophets.

CPAPs, ventilators, and mammon

Although Philips Respironics, a major provider of CPAP and ventilator machines, received thousands of complaints and numerous warnings from the Food and Drug Administration, they continued to produce breathing machines for over 10 years that they knew possessed engineering flaws and posed serious health risks to users, including already sick children, the elderly, and veterans. Complaints and warnings spoke clearly and frequently of “black particles,” “dirt,” and “dust,” possibly “toxic and carcinogenic,” inside the machines that could find their way into the “noses, mouths, throats, and lungs” of their vulnerable users. “All the while, people using Philips machines were suffering from illnesses that no one could explain: vomiting, dizziness and headaches, along with newly diagnosed cancers of the lungs, throat, sinuses and esophagus.”

While ignoring these complaints, warnings, and preventable health risks for ten years, Philips engaged in aggressive and global marketing of these machines, allowing company stock prices to soar “to the highest levels in decades.”

Consistent with the mores of our entire culture, money came first and above all things. Health and human life took a backseat to greed.

Now, what, pray tell, do our priests, pastors, and prophets have to say about such antisocial behavior that so clearly denies the worth of every soul, risks death, and is indicative of deep social, cultural, and spiritual transgression?

Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero.

The uninformed and undiscerning might think that the issue addressed here is something that should not be brought under the rubric of “sin.” They might imagine that this example of

corporate misanthropic behavior does not come under the purview of priests or pastors or prophets. But they would be wrong, as even the most casual of readings in the Hebrew prophets demonstrates. The Hebrew prophets were keen observers and vociferous critics of private business practices and public policy makers that acted in ways harmful to individuals and society.

As one reads of Philips' inferior, defective, and harmful devices, and the search for profit through them, one thinks of analogous situations in ancient Israel as commented on and criticized by the Hebrew prophets. Here is but one of dozens of examples that could be plied.

“Hear this, those who weary the impoverished
to the end that they ruin the land’s downtrodden—
thinking: ‘when will the new moon sabbath be over
so that we can sell grain;
and the weekly sabbath
so that we can make our produce available,
while shrinking the size of the dry measure,
increasing the weight of šeqel,
and rigging fraudulent scales
to buy the underprivileged with money
and the impoverished at the cost of a pair of sandals.
We will even sell worthless debris mixed in with the grain!’”¹

The context of this passage is, of course, different than that found in relation to the Philips supplied breathing machines. However, there are principled similarities. First, Philips managers sold an inferior product just as ancient Israel’s wheat merchant did. Second, the inferior product was sold with the highest priority given to profits and profit margins. Third, profits were prioritized over other’s needs, including health impacts that their actions and products might have on consumers.

¹ Amos 8.⁴⁻⁶ (author’s translation). See our two-part homily series on this passage entitled, “Fraudulently selling bad product at inflated prices.”

There is ample prophetic evidence that those engaged in such malevolently immoral business practices as those of the Israelite wheat merchants were never held to account by those who had responsibility for looking out for the public's interest. Philips managers have not and will not be held accountable for their malevolently immoral business practices which put health and life at risk for millions all around the globe. Not by the priests, pastors, or prophets and not by the legal system. White collar business crimes go almost universally unpunished. Indeed, so thoroughly have laws become corrupted by malevolently immoral policy and law makers that such crimes are not even called crime. This too has its ancient precedent.

“Warning! To those who issue oppressive statutes
and continuously write laws that afflict;
that put redress out of the reach of the underprivileged
and rob the poor among my people of justice,
making prey of widows
and plundering orphans.”²

Laws are corrupted for filthy lucre. Those who put mammon above people are empowered and idolized. People suffer and die. Society becomes a hornet's nest of sociopaths. And the priests, pastors, and prophets see no evil, hear no evil, speak not of the evil.

Conclusion and benediction

In our degenerate society, the sort of behavior in which Philips, or, more pointedly, its managers were engaged is simply chalked up to the cost of doing business. All is forgiven and justified as long as profits flow and stockholders are enriched. The victims of this warping and woofing of what is good and decent are martyrs, sacrificial victims of the materialistic fertility god, whom we name, “capitalistic greed.”

This is not OK. There is nothing OK about it, notwithstanding the mute silence of the

² Isaiah 10.¹⁻².

prophetic voice in the face of such wickedness. There is no doubt that if any one of the Hebrew prophets returned today, they would have something, much of something to say about Philips' business practices along with those of all the other global conglomerates that so often seek profits at the public's expense, health, and even life.

Any priest, any pastor, any prophet worth their salt cannot remain silent. They must stand above the depravity. They can have no vested or invested interest in corporate profits, for these, surely, blind and debilitate them from fully engaging the ministry to which they are called—to be watchmen on the tower. Unfortunately, they are, themselves, all too often up to their eyeballs in their own private and corporate investment portfolios and money management firms.

I am no prophet. Nor am I anywhere near as gifted a poet as those discerning and bold Hebrew prophets of yesteryear. Nevertheless, I cannot remain silent. And I *can* imagine what they might say were they to reappear today. It might go something like this.

A cause of lamentation and warning!³
They build machines for gasping sleepers;
ventilators for the sick and dying.
But their inventions pump shards of black foam and fuzz;
spew filth and grime into deprived, damaged, and dying lungs.
Thousands of complaints year after year after year
and corporate knowledge of defects hidden
yield global campaigns for increased sales
and send profits soaring to unsurpassed heights
while innocents wheeze to breath life into corporate greed.

Let the bank accounts of the deceptive and lustful
match their moral bankruptcy.
Let deceivers sleep the sleep of sulfurous hell.

³ This is my rendering of the traditional, "Woe!"

Let those greedy for mammon breath the putrid air of Hades
until their lungs turn black with muck and mold and mildew,
and their souls choke on poisonous goop and goo
the sickly green of the color of mammon.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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