A monk asked Master Ziyong, “When you speak, the congregation assembles like clouds. In the end, who is the ‘great hero’ among women?” Ziyong said, “Each and every person has the sky over their head; each and every one has the earth under their feet.”

The monk gave a shout.

Ziyong said, “What is the point of recklessly shouting like that?” The monk then bowed respectfully and Ziyong said, “The dharma does not rise up alone—it can’t emerge without reliance on the world. If I take up the challenge of speaking I must surely borrow the light and the dark, the form and the emptiness of the mountains and hills and the great earth, the call of the magpies and the cries of the crows. The water flows and the flowers blossom, brilliantly preaching without ceasing. In this way there is no restraint.”

Koan source: Beata Grant, Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century

Student must have taken at least one preaching course, or document significant preaching experience in congregational settings. 3.0 Units.

This course is for students wanting to equip themselves to address the critical issues of our times in the stream of prophetic preachers of past and present. It will focus on the prophetic sermon within liberal religious contexts. The content of student sermons will concentrate on our current global unraveling/revolution/turning. Realistic assessment of the cascading crises and active hope grounded in sustaining and resilient theology-cosmology will be our guiding ethos. Readings on the multiple dimensions of global unraveling/revolution/turning, as well on preaching will form the textual base of study.

The above brief description captures the essential elements of this Homiletics course: (1) Prophesy. (2) The art and craft of preaching. (3) This global moment. Given these elements, this course is not solely a course in advanced preaching … it is a course in advanced preaching plus—plus the specific and demanding focus of the required content: the inescapable and disastrously perfect storm now engulfing the planet. (It is important to note that storms are intricate composites of extreme forces that overwhelm the usual/normal patterns of a system.)

The practice of ministry is a complex, relational vocation necessitating the development of numerous artful skills. Preaching (truth telling) is one of the most essential of these. As one of the deeper arts of liberal ministry, preaching enjoins us to take seriously the critical issues of our times—and to discover ways to address them that are compelling, honest, clear, accurate, ineluctable and authentic. The critical nature of these times has such magnitude, with such devastating and terminal consequences (e.g. species extinction, acidification of the oceans)—all future religious leadership will ultimately be valued by how well this reality will be addressed.
The course will weave the three named elements throughout the entire semester. We will explore the dynamics of prophesy through the study of several major prophetic theological and eco-activist voices, both religious and secular, in order to ground our work in the deep traditions of justice-making, as well as to activate and vitalize our own courage to speak truth to power.

Secondly, limiting the course’s sermon content to the dilemmas of this global moment will uniquely shape our work. Not only is this era complex as well as vast, especially in the number of issues that are pressing into global visibility (climate change, species extinction, economic unraveling, transnational expansion/entrenchment of economic and military empire, etc.), there are also particular psycho-social-political-economic forces which are being activated that both overtly and covertly undermine possible solutions. Exploration of these compounded issues will call us to a richer individuation as well as to the act of claiming a firmer inseparability from the whole of humankind and of life.

Lastly, the nature of the sermon, its power to persuade, heal, inspire, challenge, educate, clarify, re-member, invigorate, encourage, dispassionately interrogate (offering a view which is far-reaching, sweeping, comprehensive and wise) will demand focused experiential study and exploration. What are the special and particular powers of the sermon that are critical for our times. What forms can/should the prophetic sermon take? How is our authenticity fundamental to sermon “delivery,” and how can we tap our authentic voice at will? What exercises will help develop the authentic voice (in concert with good old common practice)? How do we live prophetically?

Class Components

The class will involve study and experiences in four areas:

- Preaching: In class and in congregations and/or in SKSM Chapel.
- Small and large group critique of peer sermons (video filming-viewing will be an on-going part of critiquing work).
- Invited speakers, as coaches and as examples of ministering prophetically, will visit a number of classes.
- Readings in texts and articles and viewing videos of preachers at work, researchers and activists sharing their learnings.

Preaching Requirements

Students will preach, speak and read aloud several times per month in class. Unitarian Universalist Students will be required to preach one time outside class in a congregation in the Pacific Central District (preferably in a congregation where they have not previously preached) … if it can be arranged. The Dates and sites are in process of being arranged; students will collectively work out which dates/sites will be their
choice. In lieu of that “outside” preaching location, one opportunity to preach in Chapel will also be reserved for a student from this class.

Students other than UU, who want to preach in a congregation of their denomination, will work with the professor to identify sites and dates where they can fulfill the “outside” requirement. They may also choose to preach at one of the UU selected sites.

The entire class will design an SKSM Chapel service for a Tuesday in December focusing on This Global Moment and the Issues of Prophecy.

**Possible Required Texts**

There will be two or so texts in each category (below) that I will assign, and then each student will pick one to three more from the list according to their particular inclinations.

There will be additional critical reading, however, from articles drawn from available materials that will be just as important as the final text list, and, in addition, there will be on-line videos required.

My concern for text choice reveals one of my biases about preaching: it is a much about good research, writing/crafting language-image-story, as it is about dynamic, authentic presentation. However … Authenticity, speaking from what is most authentic in us, is the rock on which successful prophetic preaching is built. Why? Because authenticity is a major pathway to and an expression of the sacred; it is, in its fullness, the sacred come into being in human consciousness.

**This Global Moment: Dilemma and Resistance**

*Eaarth*, Bill McKibben  
*A Paradise Built in Hell*, Rebecca Solnit  
*The End of Everything*, Richard Heinberg  
*Coming Back to Life* (new edition 10/14), Joanna Macy and Molly Brown  
*Requiem for a Species*, Clive Hamilton  
*The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander

**Prophecy: From What Source Comes Our Strength?**

*The Prophets*, Abraham Heschel  
*The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Bruggeman  
*Defending Mother Earth*, Jace Weaver  
*Ecosprit*, Catherine Keller

**Preaching: Finding the Authentic, Love-Grounded, Courageous Voice**
Freeing the Natural Voice: Imagery and Art in the Practice of Voice and Language, Kristin Linklater

Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil, Christine M. Smith

The Write Stuff: Crafting Sermons that Capture and Convince, Sondra B. Willobee

Craddock on the Craft of Preaching, Fred B. Craddock

Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach, Lenora Tubbs Tisdale