

## **Jesus' prophetic discipleship movement according to Matthew's Gospel**

Tierra Nueva & The People's Seminary

Bob Ekblad

Abstract: Jonathan Draper has inspired me through by his words of encouragement and example to pursue Biblical scholarship whilst ministering pastorally to people oft neglected by the church and academy. The following study of Matthew 10:26-28 attempts to demonstrate how the Matthean tradition understood the notion of prophetic revelation of liberating news to inform and empower active disciples in the Jesus' movement. In addition, Jesus' teaching here, inspired by the LXX of Isaiah 26:20-21, promises prophetic revelation that exposes injustices covered in darkness to listening disciples. This kind of holistic prophetic ministry is regularly practiced in many African settings and throughout the world. May this tribute to Jonathan's lifetime of empowering African leaders inspire others to follow Jesus' vibrant prophetic example.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives long and detailed instructions to his twelve disciples that show a broad ministry that includes proclamation, miraculous signs and wonders, vulnerable presence and prophetic speech. Jesus' prophetic mandate includes the exposure of the hidden crimes of powerful perpetrators in ways that draw clearly from God's revelation and judgement of concealed atrocities presented in Isaiah 26:20-21. Now is the time for disciples of Jesus to recover a prophetic voice that brings into light concealed bloodshed and injustices, inviting confession, repentance, acts of justice and restoration. Jesus-inspired holistic prophetic witness has been on display in many African settings. Let's look at how Matthew portrays Jesus both modeling and mobilizing prophetic disciples, beginning among the lost sheep of the house of Israel and expanding to the entire world.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends the twelve disciples specifically to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," and not to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. The crowds under Roman occupation depicted just prior to Jesus' commission are, "distressed and dispirited like sheep without a

shepherd” (Mt 9:36). Jesus summons his disciples and gives them authority in ways that evoke the Lord’s call and sending of Moses and Aaron to Israelite slaves in Egypt, armed with a liberation message, a staff and signs and wonders (Ex 4:1-18, 28-31).

Jesus first sends out the twelve to preach the message that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt 10:7). He instructs them to enact this Kingdom in ways he’s already demonstrated, telling them: “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (Mt 10:8).

Disciples are to go out as vulnerable missionaries, without money, extra clothes. They are sent out weaker than Moses and Aaron, as they are to go without sandals or staff. They are sent as guests, to receive hospitality from households deemed worthy, whom they are to greet, stay with and bless with peace.

In contrast, whoever does not receive these disciples or pay attention to their words receives a prophetic rebuke. Unwelcomed disciples are to go out of that house or city and shake the dust of their feet. Jesus warns: “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

The sending of the twelve is reminiscent of the YHWH’s sending of the two angels to Sodom, where they were hosted by Lot, while the people of the city sought to do violence to them. Now the lost sheep of the house of Israel, God’s chosen people, are at risk of a worse fate than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, should they refuse the messengers, whom Jesus adverts with sober detail.

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles” (Mt 10:17-18).

Jesus states clearly that they will be given prophetic revelation that will enable them to bear witness before authorities when they are arrested.

“But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Mt 10:19-20).

Jesus goes on to describe family members betraying one another to death, children rising up against parents and putting them to death. He says: “you will be hated by all because of my name” (10:22). “It is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”

Jesus prophesies a tough road ahead for his followers prior to his return.

“But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.”

Matthew’s Gospel goes on to present Jesus, himself as experiencing what he warns future disciples that they too will experience. He clarifies that his disciples will become like their teacher.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!” (Mt 10:24-25).

### **Matthew 10:26-27**

Immediately following his bleak prophetic prognosis of what disciples can expect among their own people, Jesus addresses them with words I will spend the rest of this article commenting.

“Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops” (Mt 10:26-27).

Jesus directly addresses the most natural human tendency to be terrified and intimidated into silence by persecutors when he tells his disciples: “do not fear them.” The reason given to not fear is cryptic, requiring more careful analysis.

“For there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

Furthermore, Jesus assures his disciples that they themselves will be the agents who will reveal that which is concealed and “make known” what is hidden. How would that commission help them to not fear their aggressors?

Is Jesus stating here that fear must be overcome by the assurance that what’s been concealed and hidden in the hearts of his disciples will be revealed and made known, through the proclamation of disciple spokespersons, as Bonnard argues?<sup>1</sup> Or that what is concealed and hidden will finally come to light in the eschatological judgement, as Boring argues.<sup>2</sup> Bonnard bases his interpretation on Jesus’ earlier teaching that believers are the light of the world, “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Mt 5:14), and other texts stating that the hidden message will be revealed.<sup>3</sup> In fact Matthew 11:25-26 does show that Jesus hides revelation from the wise and intelligent, who could be seen as more powerful opponents of the Jesus movement and reveals to infants, inviting would-be disciples into a child-like posture.

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight.”

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bonnard, *L’Evangile Selon Saint Matthieu*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1992, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 11:25; 13:35, 44.

Persecuted disciples would be encouraged by Jesus' commitment to revealing truth to them, especially since "infants" has the broader meaning of uneducated and unskilled.<sup>4</sup> Jesus goes on to further clarify his commitment to connect disciples to his Father and theirs (See Mt 11:27).

That Jesus shows lifts of his uneducated, humble disciples, offering them with direct revelation would certainly encourage them to continue forward in the face of revelation. However I see additional and essential link to Israel's prophetic tradition, embodied by Jesus and passed on to his disciples.

### **Matthew 10:26-27's links to the LXX of Isaiah 26:20-21**

The language and themes in these verses and earlier in Matthew 6 link Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10:26-27 to Isaiah's prophetic tradition, most notably in Isaiah 26:20-21.

"Come, my people, enter into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide for a little while until indignation runs its course. For behold, the Lord is about to come out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; and the earth will reveal her bloodshed. And will no longer cover her slain."

Here, Isaiah prophecies a time of indignation (Greek *orge*) which must run its course. The Lord will come out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, "and the earth will reveal her bloodshed, and will no longer cover her slain." Jesus' description of the opposition facing his prophetic discipleship movement could fit into the categories of iniquity, bloodshed and victims addressed in Isaiah 26:21. Is Jesus strengthening future disciples' resolve through assuring them that everything done against them will come to light and that eventual justice and vindication is assured?

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<sup>4</sup> The underlying Greek term for "infants," *nēpios* (νήπιος) includes the metaphoric meaning "untaught, unskilled," occurring in the LXX of the Psalms with these meanings (LXX Ps 18:7; Ps 115:6; 118:130). See

Isaiah 26:20's time of indignation, when the Lord comes out of his place to punish the earth's inhabitants appears elsewhere in texts describing God's judgement such as the flood and Exodus narratives, with an interesting link which we will explore later with Matthew's Gospel.

The Lord sees that the wickedness was great on the earth (Gn 6:5), commissioning Noah to build an ark, bring in his family and pairs of animals before himself, closing the doors behind them before the destructive floodwaters come (7:16).

The time of indignation "running its course" and the Lord coming out of his place to punish links this text directly to the Passover account in Exodus 12. The Hebrew verb underlying "running its course," *ever* (עָבַר), "pass over, through, pass on," is the primary verb associated with the Lord's passing through Egypt to strike Egypt's firstborn,<sup>5</sup> though it is not the word *pesah* (פָּסַח), meaning Passover.

The call to "enter your rooms" then can be associated with entering the ark and the Lord's instruction for the children of Israel to stay in their houses before the morning of their flight from Egyptian oppression. They are to first mark their doorposts and lintels with the blood of the slaughtered lamb, staying under cover until the judgement passes.

"You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.<sup>23</sup> "For the Lord will pass through (עָבַר) to smite the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over (פָּסַח) the door and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you" (Ex 12:23).

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<sup>5</sup> Ex 12:12,23

In Isaiah 26:20 the Lord calls his people who've entered their houses and closed their doors to "hide for a little while" until the time of indignation passes. This verse is both directly linked and contrasted with the LXX of Genesis 7:16 and with Matthew 6:6.

In the Greek version of Isaiah 26:20, the underlying word behind "room" is *tameion*, meaning "innermost, hidden, secret room." This is the same word Jesus uses in his teaching about prayer in Matthew 6:6.

"But you, when you pray, go into your inner room (*tameion*), close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

The Greek version of Isaiah 26:20's call to enter your room is word-for-word the same as Matthew 6:6, apart from the verb "shut," which in Isaiah means "to firmly shut" (*apokleio*). Firmly shutting the door is urged during times of upheaval. In contrast, Jesus simply tells us to go inside and shut the door (*kleio*)—the same Greek verb used for God's shutting the door of the ark in the LXX of Genesis 7:16. In Matthew 6, Jesus adds that our Father is there inside awaiting us, seeing what is done in secret and ready to reward us.

Rather than hiding until the time of indignation passes, Jesus tells his disciples to "pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Returning to Matthew 10:26-27, we can observe a dramatic contrast with Isaiah 26:20-21. In Isaiah 26:21 it is the earth that reveals its bloodshed and doesn't cover it's slain. In Matthew 10:26 revelation at first appears to be passive: "there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." And it is not clear what will be revealed and made known, as in Isaiah. Who will reveal what has been concealed and make known what is hidden? What will be revealed and made known?

Here the text allows room for unknown actors other than Jesus' disciples to reveal and make known—like the earth itself in Isaiah 26:21.

The earth revealing her bloodshed evokes Cain's killing of his brother Abel in Genesis 4:10-11. The Lord confronts Cain, saying to him:

“What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand” (Gn 4:10).

The contextual exegetical links between the Septuagint of Isaiah 26:21 and Genesis 4:10-11 are stronger than in the underlying Hebrew text. The Septuagint uses the Greek noun *gē* (γη) to match the Hebrew noun for ground, *'adāmâ* (אדמָה) in Genesis 4:10 and earth, *'eres* (אֶרֶץ) in Isaiah 26:20-21, rather than two separate Greek words.

The language regarding the earth revealing her bloodshed in the Septuagint links this text to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10:22 that “there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed,” with a slight difference. In Matthew 10:22 *apokalyptō*, (ἀποκαλύπτω) is used, whereas in Isaiah 26:21 the Greek verb *anakalypto* (ἀνακαλύπτω) appears.

These verbs have very similar meanings and could be considered synonyms. *Anakalypto* is defined as “to cause something to be uncovered — ‘to unveil, to remove a veil, to uncover.’”<sup>6</sup> In contrast, *apokalypto* means “to uncover, to take out of hiding, to cause something to be fully known — ‘to reveal, to disclose, to make fully known, revelation.’”<sup>7</sup> In the Greek Version of Isaiah (LXX) both of these verbs are used to match the underlying Hebrew verb *galah* (גָּלַהּ), “to uncover.”

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<sup>6</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Accordance electronic ed., 79.117.

<sup>7</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Accordance electronic ed., 28.38



The Septuagint matches the Hebrew verb *galah*, with the Greek verb *anakalypto* in Isaiah 26:21 and in numerous other places,<sup>8</sup> including the *piel* verb form.<sup>9</sup> However the *piel* form *galah* is far more often matched in the LXX by *apokalyptō*.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus here clarifies himself as the revealer. He then mobilizes his disciples as prophets: “What I tell you in the darkness, [you pl.] speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, [you pl.] proclaim upon the housetops.”

Jesus’ focus on communication with God is in alignment with Matthew’s deliberate focus on Jesus training his disciples to engage in prayer and prophetic witness, all based on revelation (Mt 11:25, 27; 16:17).<sup>11</sup>

Jesus will speak to disciples “in the darkness,” which you will hear “in the ear” must be then “spoken in the light” and “proclaimed upon the housetops.”

This is both in alignment with Isaiah’s description of a time of exposure, where injustice and crimes long covered up will be brought into plain view. It is also distinct, as Jesus focuses disciples’ attention on exposing the crimes of persecutors.

Jesus himself models this prophetic exposure in Matthew’s Gospel and the other Gospel accounts. He knows what his adversaries are thinking and directly addresses their secret judgements (Mt 9:3-4; 12:25), challenging them publicly (Mt 9:4-5; 12:25-37). Jesus prophesies his own suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and his eventual death (Mt 16:21; 20:18-19).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the parable of the landowner in Matthew 22:33-44, where Jesus exposes the vineyardists who kill the absentee landlord’s son, and their eventual

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<sup>8</sup> Jb 33:16; Ps 17(18):15; Is 22:14; 47:3; 49:9; Jer 13:22; Da LXX 2:22, 28, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Dt 22:30 (23:1); Jb 12:22; 20:27; 41:4(5); Is 22:8,9; 26:21; 47:2; Jer 29(49):10.

<sup>10</sup> Lv 18:6,7,7,8,9,10,11,11,12,13,15,16,17,17,18,19; 20:11,17,18,19,20,21; Nm 22:31; Dt 22:30(23:1); 27:20; Ru 3:4,7; Jb 12:22; 41:4(5); Ps 97(98):2; 118(119):18; Pr 11:13; Ho 2:10(12); Mi 1:6; Na 3:5; Is 47:2; Jer 11:20; 20:12; Lam 2:14; 4:22; Ez 13:37; 22:10; 23:10, 18, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus also teaches his disciples, as in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Disciples in the ancient world were to learn their masters teachings by heart. In addition, Jesus values scribes, or scholars being disciples, as in Matthew 13:52. “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

judgement, indicting the chief priests and the Pharisees, who then try to seize him (Mt 22:45-46). Jesus exposes and denounces the hypocrisy of the scribes, and Pharisees in ways quite similar to Israel's prophets (Mt 23:1-33). He then directly identifies his future disciples as prophets, whom the Pharisees will persecute, perpetuating the shedding of their ancestors' blood, using the language of Matthew 10, with allusions to Isaiah 26:20-21.

“Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Mt 23:34-36).

In Matthew 24 Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple (Mt 24:1-2), warning his disciples of deceivers, false Christs, wars, famines, and earthquakes, coming persecution, and apostasy in an increasingly hostile and chaotic world. In this chapter a shift takes place, where Jesus prophesies about the nations and persecutors include the non-Jewish nations.

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.... Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name” (Mt 24:7, 9).

Matthew presents Jesus as universalizing his commission in the face of increasing disorder, going far beyond the earlier sending to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This is in alignment with his final words to his disciples in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples of all the nations,” and shows that the disciples' prophetic role expands accordingly.

“Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:12-14).

Jesus then prophesies apocalyptic events, including his return for his elect, before some final parables of judgment in Matthew 25.

Jesus expands his prophecies of judgment of Israel to a universal judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31-46. The non-Jewish nations are justified or condemned based on how they receive his missionary disciples.

Jesus here teaches on the future judgment of non-Jews (the nations=*ethnos*), whom he commissions his disciples to evangelize and make disciples of before he departs. This parable is not about the judgment of nation states as institutions (though they will be judged), but about Jesus' future response to how people treat his followers who go out spreading the word.

In this parable the Son of Man comes in his glory with all the angels and takes his seat on his glorious throne (Mt 25:31). All the non-Jewish people are described as being gathered before him and like a shepherd he separates sheep from goats. He says to the sheep, identifying himself as their shepherd and the Son of the Father:

“Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

“For I was hungry... thirsty... a stranger... naked... sick... imprisoned” and “you gave me food... drink... hospitality... prison visits.”

These “righteous” do not understand when they had done this for him, this Son of Man-- the Shepherd King. They hadn't recognized him or made the associations he names.

“The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me’ (Matt 25:40).

Who exactly are the King's “brothers” and also “the least of these” in this parable? Is this referring to anyone in the category of poor, naked, sick or prisoner as is most commonly understood among Christian interpreters?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For most of my ministry I read this as referring to anyone in the category of hungry, sick, naked, a foreigner, or prisoner. This interpretation puts permanent pressure on all non-Jews to serve everyone who fits into these categories—or else you will be accursed and sent into “the eternal fire which has been prepared for the

In the light of Jesus' instructions, commissioning of the twelve and detailed description of the adversity awaiting them in Matthew 10 I am convinced this parable is about God's judgment of non-Jews who receive or reject followers of Jesus as they go to fulfill Jesus' commission to make disciples, baptize and teach.

The King states "to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me."

In Matthew Jesus consistently refers to his disciples as his brothers, distinct from blood brothers/sisters (see Matt 12:48; 28:10). A key Scripture is Matthew 10:40-42, where Jesus says to his disciples:

"The one who receives you receives me," and "whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink... shall not lose his reward."

Jesus clearly defines his brothers, sisters and mother as the ones who do the will of his Father in Matthew 12:48-50.

"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Behold my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus also calls fellow believers to treat one another as brothers and sisters (Mt 18:15 35; 23:8) of our common Father in heaven.

Western or even more mainstream Christians in the Global South may find identifying Jesus' followers as the hungry, thirsty, naked, foreigners, imprisoned of this parable difficult due to people's distance from the ragged and persecuted state of early Christ followers and today's persecuted believers and precarious ministry workers. Yet Christians today are marginalized, persecuted and martyred like never before in history in many places throughout the world, including many African settings.

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devil and his angels" (25:42). Is this the motivation Jesus is suggesting we should have as we minister to the poor, immigrants, refugees and prisoners? I don't think so. God's abundant and tender love for the poor and excluded is the only sustainable motivation.

As we have already seen above, Jesus' disciples who carry on his mission were sent out in vulnerability, without money, extra clothes or even sandals (Matt 10:10), as persecuted "sheep in the midst of wolves." They were often strangers and even foreigners as they went from village to village and to foreign lands, fleeing persecution (Matt 10:16-23). They were dependent upon people's hospitality. But they were often rejected, persecuted, imprisoned and martyred (Matt 5:10-12).

In Jesus' parable, receiving them equals receiving him—a total identification. Jesus identifies himself, the King, with the "least of these." This represents his deliberate inclusion of the humblest of his recruits who go out on mission. When people receive a humble disciple of Jesus, Jesus says they are receiving the King, the Son of the Father himself.

So this parable is a prophetic parable, describing God's blessing of those who actively welcome and care for Jesus' vulnerable disciples, and judgment of those who do not.<sup>13</sup>

So much more could be said about prophetic witness in Matthew's Gospel as an essential component of Jesus' ministry, which he passes on to his disciples.

Isaiah 26:20-21 and Matthew 10:26-27 are highly relevant to the times in which we live. This is a period when the sins of the powerful are being increasingly brought to light. Victims of clergy, politicians (or anyone's) sexual abuse are coming forward to tell their stories. The bodies of First Nation's children are being unearthed from mass graves in Canadian residential schools. Wiki-leaks like exposés of corruption, war atrocities, covert operations, corruption and gross economic inequalities are relentless. Scientists and activists document and decry with urgency the disappearance of species and polar icecaps due to global warming. Many people today are rightly identifying, lamenting and denouncing historical, generational and current traumas, refusing to remain silent in the interests of healing and justice. All of this shows that God's judgment is underway as the movement of sacred history includes all the deeds of darkness coming into the light.

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<sup>13</sup> See Elian Cuvillier's excellent article, "Justes et petits chez Matthieu: L'interprétation du lecteur a la croisée des chemins," *Etudes Théologique et Religieuses*, 1197/3, p. 359.

Disciples of Jesus must have nothing to do with cover-ups, but rather be at the forefront of this kind of revelatory activism, guided by Jesus himself. But often secular activists are leading the way.

Today's revealers include secular whistle blowers like Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, and Chelsea Manning, as well as many other organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Christians have often been at the forefront of liberation struggles, exposing injustices in ways consistent with Jesus' teaching here in Matthew 10:26-27. Included among them are more famous South Africans like the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and anti-apartheid activists like Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak, along with untold numbers of lesser-known prophetic voices and martyrs. In Zimbabwe, Christian leaders are at times at the forefront, exposing injustices as an integrated feature of their mission.<sup>15</sup>

Professor Emeritus Jonathan Draper has been a socially-engaged Bible scholar and Anglican priest in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa for the better part of his life. As a priest serving Zulu congregations, and more recently amidst the elderly and incarcerated. Jonathan has regularly locates himself amidst ordinary Black South Africans and is attuned to their struggles. He participated in the struggle against apartheid and has spent his life raising up African leaders. As Professor of New Testament at the University of Kwazulu-Natal he has taught and supervised theology students from across the African continent. Jonathan has modeled to me a life-long commitment to dynamic mix of pastoral engagement with parishioners and students, thorough research and writing in the area of his specialization in New Testament, sensitive listening to the Spirit and prophetic witness when called for. I am grateful for Jonathan's witness a disciple himself, and someone who has followed the call to make disciples.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.pplaaf.org](http://www.pplaaf.org)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/22/critic-zimbabwes-government-fears-his-life>

Disciples of Jesus must engage in this prophetic exposure, as Jesus himself modeled. This requires deliberate watchfulness and prayer, followed by bold and appropriate witness.

Going into our rooms and shutting the door, as indicated in Isaiah 26 and Matthew 6 must not be escapist. Rather it involves first a deep recognition of our worsening situation that would alert us to the need to enter our rooms. Things are only going to become more dire, and we must resist denial and false hopes.

Jesus calls us to pray to our Father there in the secret place, where our identity becomes clarified as we come to more fully know ourselves as sons and daughters in God's family, in the Kingdom of God's Son, Jesus Christ. There, in the secret place, we listen for words, which nurture, empower, expose root issues, and direct our next steps, showing us our course of action, the way of righteousness, in Jesus' liberation movement.

### **References for Ekblad, "Jesus' prophetic discipleship movement according to Matthew's Gospel"**

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Elian Cuvillier, "Justes et petits chez Matthieu: L'interprétation du lecteur a la croisée des chemins," *Etudes Théologique et Religieuses*, 1197/3, p. 359.