



Woe to the Unambitious: Greta as Prophet

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Prophets provoke a reckoning, a moment of truth that cannot be denied. The illusion of righteousness is dispelled. The mask of insincerity is ripped away. The mirror is held aloft, and we must consider our reflection without lie or deception. The complacency of the cautious and circumspect remains tenable no longer.

While I am reluctant to bestow the title of prophet on anyone, there can be no doubt that Greta Thunberg and many [other youth](#) are a force of reckoning today, crying out: Woe to you politicians and wielders of power! Your failure to act on climate change with speed and ambition simply cannot persist.

As [Greta declared](#) at the U.N. Climate Action Summit, “For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you’re doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.”

Greta tells us that we are failing. She tells us that if world leaders understand the situation but fail to act, then they are, well, evil. And, she is right. There is no sugarcoating it. There is no spit and polish to make it look any different.

All this from a teenager who skewers those who pretend to be informed adults, but whose actions reveal a stark regression in outlook and behavior. When it comes to the “uncomfortable” numbers of climate science, these grown-ups are “still not mature enough to tell it like it is.”

Greta’s language evokes the unsettling words of Jesus who declared words of “woe” to leaders who failed to exercise their responsibilities with justice as they loaded people with “burdens hard to bear” without lifting “a finger to ease them” (Luke 11:46).

Greta is right in declaring that the youth of today have drawn a line. We can no longer run, hide, or feign ignorance. We can no longer wait for others to act. We can no longer excuse our inaction. Greta won’t abide claims of hopelessness. Hope comes to those who act, so get out there. Join your kids and grandkids in the street.

The true test of character now is ambition. This is the measuring stick before which we must all stand day after day. If we fail to measure up, Greta assures us that there will be no forgiveness from the generations to come.

The line has been drawn. The question for all of us adults is this: on what side shall we stand? The prophet has spoken. Harsh truths have been laid bare. The moment of reckoning is upon us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brooks Berndt is Minister of Environmental Justice for the United Church of Christ. He recently released [a church-based discussion guide](#) for Greta Thunberg's book "No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference."

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