



# Professional Consultants for Dysfunctional Societies

**Rev. Brooks Berndt**  
**Minister for Environmental Justice**

The popular thing to do these days when your organization or company is facing a sizable problem is to hire a consultant. I figure our society could use some consultants to address the climate crisis, so I took it upon myself to identify a select group of individuals who have extensive experience in forcing societies into a moment of reckoning—a reckoning that profoundly jolts and rocks their status quo.

In the United States especially, the group of boat rockers whom I have identified happen to have immense cultural capital and influence a large portion of the voting public, who avidly consume their teachings on a regular basis. This sometimes peculiar and often rebellious bunch are collectively known as the Prophets. From Moses to Mary, they have a multitude of lessons for us today, but I will focus on three crucially important lessons that they shared in my consultations:

## **Lesson #1 from the Prophet Moses: Confront the Powerful with a Demand**

This lesson may seem obvious in both ancient and modern contexts, but it warrants emphasis. Imagine the story of Moses without him confronting Pharaoh with his famous demand, “Let my people go!” (Ex. 5:1, NRSV). Without this, there really is no story. Moses’s life would have largely consisted of tending to Jethro’s flocks. Similarly, imagine if our approach to the climate crisis boiled down to making better consumer choices or living “a simple life” without ever making demands of the government officials who hold power in our society. One can live a morally pure life tending to sheep, but change comes by applying one’s morals to those on the throne.

## **Lesson #2 from the Prophet Jeremiah: Go Public with Courage**

Jeremiah was a youth when God instructed him to be “a prophet to the nations,” and, like Moses, the idea of taking on the prophetic mantle of

confronting rulers filled him with fear and trepidation (Jer. 1:5, NRSV). Jeremiah was given the unenviable divine authority to “pull down” and “overthrow” kingdoms (Jer. 1:10, NRSV). With such a daunting task placed upon him, Jeremiah was to “gird up” his “loins” and make his denunciations “in the hearing” of all Jerusalem (Jer. 1:17 and 2:2, NRSV). The *social* part of social change requires taking action in public. Jeremiah could have conducted a private letter writing campaign with King Josiah, but undoubtedly none of us would now know his name. Similarly, if we truly want to change the system that has brought us to this point, we will need to muster up the courage to go beyond online action alerts, petitions, and tweets to make our demands in the public square.

### Lesson #3 from the Prophet Mary: Justice Is Our Cry

In one of the most revolutionary passages in the Bible, Mary declares that God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52, NRSV). As a teenage Jewish Palestinian girl in the backwaters of a mighty empire, her faith centered upon the kind of justice that rises as the people rise. To think of the climate crisis as simply a science problem in need of technological solutions is an act of denial. The leading environmental justice scholar [Robert Bullard notes](#) that underlying the climate crisis is an “apartheid system of global decision-making.” He observes, “Equity has to take center stage because people who have contributed the least to climate change and global warming are the ones that feel it first, worst, and longest. So justice can’t just be a footnote. Justice has to be at the center of everything.”

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt is the Environmental Justice Minister for the United Church of Christ and the author of [Cathedral on Fire: A Church Handbook for the Climate Crisis](#).

LEARN [ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

DONATE [ucc.org/donate](http://ucc.org/donate)

ARCHIVE [bit.ly/witness4justice](http://bit.ly/witness4justice)



*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*