

“God’s Word Comes from the Field”

Back in the earlier 80’s a young man came up to me after the sermon and said that he came to church to learn more about Jesus. That simple comment forced me to ask myself the question about proclaiming the word of God from the pulpit. Several years later one of my Intern’s was a Political Science Major in college and I had to remind him that a sermon was not a political speak. At the same time if you look at the context for both the Old Lesson and the Gospel, we have reference to King Jeroboam of Israel and the king’s sanctuary. With the suggestion that Amos was not attached to the temple of the royal courts. In other words, did not have the proper credentials. And then we have in the Gospel today starts with King Herod, who heard of the disciples preaching about Jesus. And then the story about the arrest and death of John the Baptist, the result of John declaring the truth about his marriage to Phillip’s wife was not lawful in the eyes of the Lord.

The challenge and the privilege of proclaiming God’s Word is always a three-way conversation. First of all, what is God saying today from the text assigned to this week. Second what is happening in the world around and with in us. Finally, the images, the stories, the illustrations, the way that Word is framed and proclaimed is mixed with the talents and gifts that God has given not only the preacher but also the people of God, in the pew, on the streets or in the fields. God’s Spirit is not confined by these walls, or the halls of Seminary or headquarters, not this country or any others.

Let us look first at the prophet Amos. Here we have a shepherd, called by God to proclaim the Word of God. A case where one of the faithful in the pew was open to see and to hear the Word of God.

The vision was not from the extra-terrestrial type but something common to his everyday life, a wall, and a plumb line, in other words God was setting a standard to measure the actions of the people in relationship to what they said and did in the sanctuaries of God and what they said and did in the marketplace, and what was most upsetting to the people in authority was what God was going to do about this. If we would read the rest of Amos “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring something to drink!” The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks...” No wonder Amos was threatening the power of priests and the King. Not only that but as Amos 5:21-24 puts it God was not happy with their religious faithfulness: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

I believe that what Amos proclaimed is expressed so well in our song: Let Justice Flow like Streams (717EL) “Let justice flow like streams of sparkling water, pure, enabling growth,

refreshing life, abundant cleansing sure." V.3 "So may God's plumb line, straight, define our measure true, and justice, right, and peace pervade this world our whole life through."

Let us take a look at one of God's plumb lines, for us today. It is the Lord's Prayer. We pray, "Our Father", not mine, not this country, but a very personal belief that every living person is a part of God's family, if we like it or not. "Who is in heaven, hallow be your name." We know where God is in heaven and that God's name is to be worshipped and praised. We are called to seek God's complete transformation of the world. In this prayer we are the focus on the present and future honoring of God, the coming of God's empire and the doing of God's will. In the words "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done!", these words that Jesus taught, reflect a fundamental discontent with Rome's world. The "Give us our daily bread" petition was a pray for daily necessities that was so precarious in the imperial world, of Jesus day. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation", these verses may ask God for strength to survive the harsh present times between the followers of Jesus today and those in authority, both religious and civil leaders, then and now. As the Interpreters Bible foot notes comment: "to urge God to complete God's purpose so that the disciples are not tempted to think God is faithless, inactive and powerless in the chaotic present." Such as many believe today. "But deliver us from evil." The last petition in the Lord's Prayer, urges God to bring about the final rescue, saving from the world dominated by the devil and its agent Rome."

Amos was not there as a spokesperson for some prophetic school, or political party Amos was there because God had called him. Result, Amos was kicked out and banned from prophesy to the people of God and the religious leaders and King, of the Northern Kingdom.

Our Gospel lesson for today is a powerful story of John the Baptist. A prophet called to prepare the way for the Messiah found himself in prison because he proclaimed the truth. I am sure that the followers of John were praying for his release only to discover that he had been beheaded not because of evidence that convicted him of wrong doing but because the powerful had to save face, John the Baptist was executed. The King throw a dinner party for the ruling class of Galilee, the nobility, the army and civic leaders. Despite this impressive gathering of political, military and economic interests, it is a young dancing girl and a drunken oath that finally determines the fate of the Baptist and in whims of the powerful, a human life was traded to save royal face. When ever we are faced with the feeling that something is not fair, think of John the Baptist!

The Good News for today, is not that you have been delivered from the sickness, old age, or economic mess, but that in the midst of this darkness, God has sent the Holy Spirit to be with us to follow our Savior and Lord, to make a difference in this place at this time. "Be not afraid!" Because we do not walk alone. God has promised us in the words of the second lesson several things. First of all, collectively we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, not as a single congregation, or as a Synod, or ELCA, but from the store front gathering of Christians to the cathedrals around the world, wherever the Name of God is honored, praised and called

upon, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, to be a blessing. Second, God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless because of the gift of the cross, and the presence of the holy Spirit.

The second lesson speaks to all of us when it says that, "In Christ we have been redeemed through His Blood, received that forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace that he lavished on us...this loving God has made known to us the mystery of God's plan in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Finally, God has put His stamp of ownership on us by giving us the Holy Spirit, to the praise of His Glory.

Take note of the hymns we have and will sing, as a call to repent, and a call to action for the sake of the Kingdom of God and for the sake of the world, that God has blessed us to be a blessing to the whole world.

Taking a clue how the world came together to rescue the boys' soccer team from the cave in Thailand. There was no debate, if they were worthy, Christian, no mention of money. Just a world acting together for the sake of those in need. I think a lesson for all of the problems that we face.

Now may we reflect on the words of our songs, in the coming days, weeks and months, to help guide us in our decisions, as followers of Jesus, as families, here in Cass Lake, as a state, country and world when we pray the Lord's Prayer, that we really mean it! Amen, THAT IT MIGHT BE SO FOR US.

In the words of God of Grace and God of Glory on your people pour your power, crown your ancient church's story, bring its bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage. Cure your children's warring madness, bend our pride to your control, shame our wanton selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage lest we miss your kingdom's goal, lest we miss your kingdom's goal. Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore, let the gift of your salvation be our glory evermore. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving you whom we adore. **AMEN!**