



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON

September 22, 2013

For the last couple of months have been hearing from some of the prophets in our OT readings – mostly Jeremiah but today we hear from Amos. Amos and Jeremiah prophesied about 150 years apart from each other and Amos spoke to the area of Israel and Jeremiah to Judah, but both carried very similar messages to the people. These messages match what can be noted as a theme found throughout the Bible.

When I last preached about Jeremiah I spoke of the two themes of honoring and worshipping the true God correctly and not putting trust in that which is not God – the cracked cisterns. And Jeremiah also spoke out for the care and right treatment of all of God's people.

Today, we look at the message given by Amos. Like Jeremiah, Amos is a bit cranky. Why is Amos in a bad mood? He is in a bad mood because the rich have used their riches to burden those who will never work their way out of debt. Because making a profit has become more important than anything else in the land – more important than justice, more important than Sabbath, more important than God. He is in a bad mood because the health of the market has become a higher good than the health of the people. And meanwhile, the nation's wealth and military power are being read as signs of God's favor. And God cannot stand it anymore. It is time for an end to this way of life. And after today's verses come the end-of-the-world messages that do come to pass within 40 years of Amos's speaking. Israel is defeated and the people scattered and sent into hardships.

You understand that Amos was speaking to an entire nation on God's behalf. The place was Israel and the time was 2700 hundred years ago. The nation had enjoyed 40 years of peace and prosperity. With no one watching, Israel had reclaimed lost territories and handed them over to rich, royal friends. The rich had gotten richer and the poor had become poorer and the imbalance between the two had tipped the scale of injustice right over. There was greed and deception. Commerce was valued over people. But God tells the nation – there will be consequences. It is like the same message we hear from Jesus – you cannot serve God and wealth.

So where do we stand today as a nation? Might the words of Amos ring true for us? Have we made the Sabbath into a day for commerce – a day for doing business? Has the divide between the wealthy and the poor been growing? Do we take advantage of the poor- using them for low wages and hard work? Do the wealthy deceive and get slapped on the wrist? Is our nations' business to stay in business?

We talk about the words of the Bible as living words speaking to us today – and I think we must take seriously the warning from Amos. He, like Jeremiah, is speaking God’s words and God’s wishes to the nations. The poor must be treated well and with justice. The Sabbath must be honored and God revered and worshipped.

But when I hear Amos and when I consider his message to Israel – I feel a bit overwhelmed. How does one change the behavior of a nation and stave off the destruction and collapse of that nation? It helps me to realize that Israel was really not that large – not as large as trying to change the entire United States. So maybe I and we could start small and have an impact on a region – say three contiguous states. Maybe a message appealing for a different way of living could take hold and avert disaster. We have our pride and our identity in this part of the country – might we become witnesses to living as God would wish us to live?

In the Hunger Games the US has been divided into separate sectors and one sector has stayed independent and careful and reliant and not bought into the decadence of the rest of the country and ultimately they become the salvation of those who will listen and respond to changing their ways.

So, here is what I hear God asking of us – right now – right today. We must not be drawn into honoring business and profit and possessions as more important than the care of people and the observation of Sabbath time. We must live as witnesses and lift our voices to deny the urgency of marketing that tries to get us to live in a way that is excessive and hard to maintain and can never be truly satisfying. We can be witnesses that a simple lifestyle is a rewarding and contented way of living. And when we live simply we know that we have enough to share with others – because we have more than enough. And we look out for our neighbors to be sure that their needs are not causing them to lose hope and to live without basic food and shelter. And we honor the Sabbath and take time for rest and take time to pray and worship and honor God. The Sabbath is one of the ten commandments given for our good.

I still remember visiting former East Germany and they were bemoaning the eroding of their villages and culture of visiting each other because stores were now opening on Sunday. And while it might not happen here I have come from towns where organized sports teams played their games on Sundays. The demands on our time pulls us from rest and worship.

So, if we would serve God and Amos and Jeremiah, we will raise our voices and live our lives working for that which gives all people life – resisting greed, resisting the cracked cisterns of possessions and pleasures at the expense of other people and our own rest and refreshment.

Maybe we can make a difference. Maybe we can save this nation. Maybe we can turn Wyoming or Pinedale into a model of right living. Maybe we can be saved.

Thanks be to God.