

Amos 7:10-15
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 18, 2021

We regularly hear encouragements to witness about our Savior and all he did to save us. Sometimes we are a bit hesitant, wondering, "What should I say?" Pastors now and then get the question, "How do you find something to preach about week after week?" In today's Gospel reading Jesus sent his followers out to preach. In the Old Testament lesson Amos defended his call as a prophet. As we see how he handled the situation it gives the answer to those questions I raised and bids us to do likewise, that is, to

PROCLAIM GOD'S TRUTH

- I. To combat falsehood
- II. To fight sin
- III. To rescue souls

Falsehood was rampant then and now. It had been set up in the past. King David had won military victories and expanded the rule of Israel to the extent God had promised. His son and successor Solomon was known for his wisdom and for his building projects since he lived in a time of peace. The temple for worship and his palace were primary achievements. They required lots from the people in both labor and materials. The subjects wouldn't stand for any more from his son who took over the throne next. The northern tribes rebelled under the leadership of Jeroboam. Only the territory of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David. We speak of the Divided Kingdom thereafter, with the northern ten tribes retaining the name Israel and the South being called Judah.

Jeroboam knew that their separate existence would not continue if the citizens kept returning to worship in Jerusalem. So he set up new worship centers in Bethel and Dan, with priests that were not Levites nor sons of Aaron. He also instituted new festivals. His choice of objects to set up in these new worship centers? Golden calves. Duh! Could he pick anything dumber, with their history of making a golden calf idol during their journey to the Promised Land? Soon idolatry was rampant. In addition, the Northern Kingdom had one bad king after another. The nation was plummeting downhill.

The problems continued in the present time before us in the text. It was the early part of the eighth century B.C. God tapped Amos to confront Israel. Although he was from Judah, he announced coming punishment for Israel. The Assyrian threat

was looming. Turn from your evil ways, he called out. He shared five visions of warning.

In the midst of his activity, Azariah, one of the illegitimate priests, stepped up. He sent a message to Jeroboam II, who was not the son of the founder but ruled a century and a half later. Azariah accused Amos of conspiracy. He made it sound personal. "For this is what Amos is saying, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.'" He made it sound one-sided by not mentioning that God's prophet also told them the way to avoid the calamity. Notice he didn't call the message of Amos incorrect, just not acceptable. "The land cannot bear all his words." It's not what they wanted to hear.

He didn't wait for the king's response. He ordered Amos to leave. "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." He implied that Amos was just in this prophesying gig for the money. He was an outsider, not welcome here. Furthermore, he was an insult to the king, who decides what goes on here. (Hmm—his house, not God's—that reveals something, doesn't it?)

To show his legitimacy Amos reviewed his call from the Lord. He had adequate income before. He had been a shepherd and a vinedresser. Sycamore-fig trees grew at oases and places nearer water. Workers punctured the fruit to make it more edible. There was plenty of work for him in those two occupations. Amos had not been trained in the schools of the prophets with an eye on serving in that capacity. He had been called by the Lord and sent to Israel.

It was his truth that he proclaimed. You can't argue with God (at least it's not wise to do so). He had been given a message, so would take it where instructed.

We don't have a direct pipeline to a prophetic message but we do know what truth is: what God says. He has revealed that to us. His Word is truth. Anything opposing God's Word is false, whether it comes from learned sources, churches, or popular opinion. Stand up for and proclaim God's truth to combat falsehood.

II.

Falsehood in teaching affects behavior, so we need to proclaim God's truth to fight sin. Sin was also prevalent in the land. Earlier in the chapter Amos had spoken of God's plumb line, a weight on a string which was used to determine the evenness of a wall. What were the findings when applied to Israel's behavior? "Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare

them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam." They did not measure up. The problems with their wall were not able to be fixed with a little filing down here or a patch there. Stones jutted out and other places had recesses. It was crooked, leaning this way and that. It needed to be torn down. It was not safe.

Oh, outwardly conditions looked great. It was a time of prosperity. Many dwelt in fine houses and enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle. These were the results of increased trade after military successes. It was a time of national pride.

However, not everyone shared those good conditions. Injustices abounded. Poor people resided on the wrong side of town. They were mistreated by the wealthy. Courts did not help with the situation but compounded it with unfair verdicts. Amos called for social reforms, but that was not all. The prevailing conditions were a sign of a deeper problem.

The nation continued in the sin of their forefathers. Idolatry was widespread. Their separation from God was the cause of their bad behavior. Their moral and spiritual life was nearly bankrupt. They had broken their covenant with God. Consequences were coming. That's what they didn't want to hear. They would rather ignore what their sin deserved. If they must face it, then they would blame others, excuse themselves, or try to minimize their responsibility. They would rather be viewed as victims than to admit their guilt.

Like he did with the falsehood, Amos wouldn't shy from identifying their broken relationship with the Lord. They needed to address that problem first. He proclaimed God's truth.

The descriptions of Israel sound contemporary, don't they? We can strive to improve society as we live and work in the world, but even more important is to deal with sin. Start with yourself. Take to heart God's law. How do you fare when measured with God's plumb line? What jutting bricks or cracks and crevices show? What are your false gods? Is it yourself, with ego and pride standing out? Or maybe greed, hatred or lust lurk in your heart. Or any of a host of other wrongs. I can't answer for you; I only know myself. Confess to God. Be forgiven. Use the fresh start and power Jesus gives to fight sin. Then employ the law to oppose sin and warn against unbelief and disobedience to God.

III.

The Spirit will use your words to rescue souls. God's truth is not limited to law. There was a reason God kept sending prophets to proclaim his truth. He was passionately interested in turning people back to him. The underlying message of Amos was, "Seek the Lord and live." The Lord is a just God but above all, he is merciful. He wants no one to perish but all to know and trust the Son he sent to remove our guilt. The end of this book speaks of restoration. The northern tribes were conquered by the Assyrians three decades later, removed from their homeland and never returned to earthly sovereignty, but repentant sinners from every tribe, nation and language become part of God's kingdom under his grace now and in glory eternally in heaven.

When hearts convicted of sin hear the Savior's good news of his love and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit leads them to trust him. They receive the fullness of his blessings. They turn from evil and stand up for the truth. Was that happening in Israel? Is that why Azariah opposed Amos?

We know that the gospel transforms hearts and lives. We know it personally. God has done that for you. You know and believe in Jesus as your Savior. You rejoice in his lifting of the burden of sin and guilt from your shoulders. He took it to the cross and paid for every sin on your record. Bask in the peace of that forgiveness, knowing the bond with your Lord has been restored. You are his child in faith. Anticipate that his guidance and blessing will continue with you each day.

The assurance of faith produces boldness like Amos displayed. You and I are called to share the message. Like the disciples in today's Gospel reading we are motivated, equipped and blessed as we go forth. We have something to say. Proclaim God's truth, both the law and the gospel. It is needed by those you connect with; it benefits yourself also as you daily sin and return to the Lord for forgiveness and strength to live for him. It is not our astute wisdom or clever argumentation but the work of the Spirit that produces the results. We leave those in God's hands as we follow his call to proclaim God's truth. May he bless us as we do so!