

Proper 10
Year B 2021
Amos 7:7-15

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Today we hear from one of the greatest prophets of the Lord.

The prophets are the heroes,
if you will, of the Hebrew Scriptures.

I know many of you think that role really belongs to God
but in my mind it's really the prophets.

Let's remember that the prophets are ordinary folks,
just like you and me,
who get a visit from the Lord which changes their whole life.

A change which oftentimes does not go well for the prophet.

Speaking truth to power is risky business
yet it is the purpose of not only the prophets of old
but all the people of God throughout time.

And yet, what we see time and again from the prophets is that they are keenly aware of their call to faithfulness, justice and mercy.

Abraham Heschel, in his seminal work, *The Prophets*, states that a significant aspect of the office of prophet in Israel was to remind the king that his “sovereignty was not unlimited, that over the king’s *mishpat* [justice] stood the *mishpat* of the Lord, an idea that frequently clashed with the exigencies of government.”

The prophets of Israel experienced a decent amount of freedom to “upbraid the kings and princes for their sins.”

However, it was, Heschel states, “...an act of high treason when Amos stood at Bethel, the temple of the Northern Kingdom, and publicly prophesied, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from this land.’”

Remember, these are the words provided to him by the Lord.

Amos is dangerously close to the edge of the abyss.

The priest Amaziah informs King Jeroboam of Amos’ treasonous words.

His prophetic vision of the death of King Jeroboam.

Clearly, Amaziah does not accept Amos’ contention that King Jeroboam will die and further, that the people of Israel will be led away as captives.

Words of complete condemnation
for not only the King but the people of Israel.

Amaziah fails to accept Amos' conviction
that death and destruction are soon to come upon
the people of Israel as a result of their failures.

He is completely blind to the numerous ways
in which he and the people of Israel
have failed to keep to the law of the Lord.

At Sinai, God gave the people of God the law,
the manner through which they are to live their lives.

And Amos, as a prophet of the Lord, lays out for them their failures:

*They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes;
They trample the head of the poor into the dust;
And turn aside from the afflicted.*

It is after this condemnation that Amos proclaims God's response.

God will lay waste to Israel's religious and political establishment
for it is warped and has fallen beyond repair.

And yet, God is still faithful.

God still refers to the people of Israel as ... "my people."

God will not pass God's people by no matter their unfaithfulness.

The disregard for the law of the Lord was so pervasive that God could not even find a prophet to call from the depraved guild of prophets.

So God turned instead to Amos, a herdsman.

God trusts Amos to deliver God's word to the people of God.

As we see throughout the Book of Amos, Amos believes God's essential demand of humanity is to establish justice.

And justice is nowhere to be found in the Northern Kingdom when Amos comes on the scene.

Therefore, Amos also condemns the people of Israel.

It's important to know that Amos is from Judah, the Southern Kingdom so he's a bit of an interloper.

Amos stands without credentials.

He is simply one who has heard the word of the Lord.

The prophet is not guided by his own convictions but is under the coercion of the word God sent.

You see, Amos' integrity lies in his ability, in his willingness, and ultimately in his courage to bear testimony to the Word of God.

The Word of God that the very people of God fail to embrace or recognize.

And yet, it's clear, that if no one else
will stand for the victims of human cruelty God will.

In the words of commentator Michael Jenkins:

*The hypocrisies of people who stand on their religion
while neglecting common humanity,
who have moved the boundary markers of compassion
in their own hearts so they can
trample the needy and bring ruin to the poor
have inflamed the anger of the Lord.*

And so Amos, a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees,
who has been taken from his flock
is sent to remind the people of God of who they are,
who they belong to
and the nature of God.

Because God trusts in the prophets.

We see this play out again in today's Gospel from Mark
in which another prophet
many years later
is again speaking truth to power.

And it does not go well for this prophet, John the Baptizer.

Although it is many many years on
from the time of Amos and King Jeroboam,
not much has changed.

The strong and powerful are driven by the forces
of sex, money and power and lord it over the weak.

It is a time when injustice and brutal power prevailed.

A time so dire, God sends not only the prophet John the Baptizer
but also Jesus of Nazareth
to call the people of Israel back to lives lived in the pursuit of justice.

To call the people of God back to God.

A call to return to faithfulness, justice and mercy.

We see again that integrity lies in their ability,
their willingness,
and ultimately their courage to bear testimony to the Word of God.

As we know, they pay the ultimate price.

And now I ask that we take a realistic look at our time.

What do we know of the ways of the power brokers in our time and place?

Are they focused on justice and mercy?

What do know of the ways of the people of God?

Are the people of God,
are we, as the people of God,
willing to speak truth to power?

Are we, individually and as the people of God,
living lives of integrity which lie in our ability,
our willingness,
and ultimately our courage
to bear testimony to the Word of God?

Would we dare to speak and act
on behalf of the millions of individuals
that live in nations far poorer than ours
so that they too might have access to vaccines
which save lives from being lost to Covid 19?

When we are presented with several of our unhoused neighbors
seeking shelter on our grounds
do we speak out to the power brokers in our City on their behalf?

Do we engage in acts that welcome
and respect our unhoused neighbors?

Are we willing to share our abundance with those who go without?

Are we, individually and as the parish of St. Andrew's,
even able to recognize our abundance?

Will we, individually and as the parish of St. Andrew's,
speak truth to power?

It is absolutely true that this is risky business.

And yet it is the purpose of not only the prophets of old
but all the people of God throughout time.