

C Lectionary 16 7.17.22

Luke 10:38-42

Focus Statement: You don't have to earn God's love

I want to start out this morning with Amos, because last week when Mary was reading the Amos passage, I had one of those "ah ha" moments, where I hear something new in the text, but I can't share it with you because I don't have time between the first reading and the sermon to pull my thoughts together in any coherent way. But before I get to what Mary said, or specifically how she said it, that led to this epiphany, first a word about prophets. Prophets, as I tell you every time I want to talk about prophets, are truth-tellers. The role of the prophet is to look around a society and tell the people in power exactly what is happening, no punches pulled.

Last week's passage used a metaphor about a plumb line. A plumb line, for the non-contractors in the group, is a piece of rope or twine with a weight at the end that you can use to make sure your wall or fence or whatever you're building is straight. This, as you can imagine, is pretty important, because if your wall has a lean to it, it's liable to fall over. The passage opened like this, "This is what [the Lord GOD] showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And here's where Mary's reading got me, she paused here for a moment, giggled, and then continued, "And I said, 'A plumb line.'" I love Mary's pause and observational giggle in this reading because the whole conversation between Amos and the Lord was so obvious as to be funny. A plumb line, I see a plumb line, is there some sort of a trick? There is a bit of a play on words here that we miss in the English because the Hebrew for plumb line here is *anak* which sounds a bit like the Hebrew

*anahah*, meaning sigh or groan. And sigh or groan is fitting for where the passage goes from here, God continues, “See I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel... the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword.” And we heard as the passage went on, the house of Jeroboam was not keen on this declaration and tried to send Amos into exile.

Amos refused to stop prophesying, and this week we have another captain obvious metaphor. “This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘a basket of summer fruit.’” Because, again, it was a basket of summer fruit, we’re not playing a hard guessing game here. Also, once again we have a pun that gets lost in the English translation, because the Hebrew word for summer fruit is *qayits*, which sounds similar to *qets*, which means “end.” Summer fruits sound lush and bountiful, pomegranates, figs, grapes, olives, finally reaping the rewards of the rich harvest after years of cultivation, but here’s the prophet of God saying, “nope, nice try, this is the end.”

Why did God tell the people of Israel that this was the end? Keep reading and we overhear Israel’s power players caught on a hot mic, heard saying, “when will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?” OK, wanting to work on the sabbath, not great, but wait, it gets worse. They go on, “We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances.” They’re going to cheat, in other words. They’re going to weigh the scales in their favor,

making a buck, or a lot of bucks, off the misfortune of others. To this, God through Amos delivers, in the words of one scholar, a “no” sermon. No, your actions are wrong, no you don’t get to do that, no I will not look past your actions.

No. You don’t get to do that and because you’ve been doing that, “The songs of the temple shall become wailings.” This does not sound like good news, but here’s the crazy thing dear people of God, it is. It is good news. Judgment is good news because justice is good news. Amos, and all of the prophets, are proof of a God who is actively concerned about the welfare of all God’s people. Rather than an apathetic deity sitting back and watching the chips fall where they may, God through Amos demonstrates God to be the sort of God who will not sit by while people jockey for power and authority under God’s own name.

God calling out and not standing for those who seize power and control at the expense of others honestly feels like pretty good news these days, when the world feels pretty out of control, and I feel pretty powerless. I want God to come in swinging, like Jesus did with the all talk lawyer last week and be like, no, get in line, help your neighbor. Amos seems to be giving me that God. A God who isn’t going to sit by and let people hurt and suffer, who is actively involved in disassembling anything and everything that stands in the way of life for ALL of God’s people.

Which is when, whoops, the Gospel from this week sweeps in and confuses the heck out of everything. Because in the Gospel we have Martha doing the exact right thing, making a meal to feed her guests, and Jesus being all, Mary has chosen the better thing, why don’t

you sit right here and relax. The Samaritan didn't relax! He helped the guy and that was the right answer last week, so why is sit quietly the right answer this week?!

And here's where the Gospel passage convicts me. Because here's what occurred to me about Martha this week and her plea to Jesus that Mary help her with her labors. Martha too was trying to stack the deck in her favor, trying to cheat the system and take more, but unlike the power players of Amos's time, the person Martha was trying to defraud was herself. She was trying, through her labor, to live into God's favor, to be deserving of Jesus' presence, to work her way grace.

Dear people of God, the kingdom of God looks like enough. Not too much, like the tricksters and thieves of Amos, not not enough, like the over-sacrificing of Martha's "make Mary help me, I'm working so hard." Enough, work and rest, prayer and service, rough places made smooth and crooked ways straight. And, here's the good news in the challenge of these twin passages, ours is a God who loves us through to enough. God loved Israel enough to call it out on its abuse of its poor and in need, again and again and again, Amos is just one of many examples of God telling Israel, if you keep this up, this is going to go poorly for you, and it going poorly, and God still being there on the other side. God loved Martha enough to gently chide her, sit down. You don't have to do all the things, you too can sit at the feet of the teacher and listen for a bit, we'll all eat eventually. God loved the lawyer enough to not fall into his desire for debate, forcing him instead to wrestle with a parable. And God loves you. No matter what the thing you're struggling with right now, what frustration eats at you, what issue you're wrestling with. God loves you, and God is with you in that thing.

Sometimes with a gentle call, Martha, Martha. Sometimes it's a parable that forces you to see things differently. Sometimes its harsher, the prophets don't mess. Sometimes, as Amos showed us twice, judgment comes in pun form. But here's the overarching promise of all of these readings. God is with us in the mess of this world. Listen, look, feel, taste the presence of God. Because God's love is not going anywhere. Thanks be to God. Amen.