

Amos 7:7-15 - “Plumbing the Depths of Rejection”
Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Pentecost 7 - 2021 (Proper 10B)

After the last visit with my dad before his death, I found out about some letters he wrote to his parents when he served on the front lines of the Korean War back in 1951. After reading some of these letters I learned that one of the things that frustrated my dad during that time were comments from people back in America which made it sound like they didn’t even know we were in the midst of a war. But then he remembered that it wasn’t that long ago that he felt the same way. It’s hard to appreciate things that we know little about.

That’s why I’ve been called by God to remind us that, as members of God’s Church we are in the midst of a war. Even though we may not yet have put our lives in this world on the line by speaking the truth of God’s Word, like John the Baptizer in our Gospel reading or Amos in our OT reading, we and/or our children may very soon loose our creature comforts and even our life in this world if we remain faithful to God’s Word.

So, do we abandon God’s Word in order to keep our creature comforts and life in this world? Our Christian faith cries out with a resounding NO! God’s Word is the only truth through which God gives and sustains in us the victory over our sins and all evil, and therefore eternal salvation. But the limited vision of our sinful nature cries out YES! Abandon God’s Word and cling to what you think is right. Or better yet, twist or use only parts of God’s Word so that you can ease your guilty conscience into thinking that God supports what you think.

Unfortunately we can see this abandonment of God’s Word taking place in many Christian churches today, who are accumulating for themselves “*teachers to suit their own passions*” (2 Timothy 4:3). That’s what some of God’s people were doing in the days of the prophet Amos. By that time the Kingdom of Israel had already been divided into a Northern and Southern Kingdom, with the temple in Jerusalem in the Southern part. So King Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom decided to make it easier for God’s people in the Northern Kingdom to worship and bring their offerings to the Lord by building two temples in the Northern Kingdom, one in Dan and one in Bethel (¹ Kings 12:25-31).

To encourage the people to come to these temples, instead of God’s temple in Jerusalem, Jeroboam also decided to use as the focal point of these two temples a ~~praise band~~, a golden calf. The golden calf was a symbol of prosperity, which the people were enjoying at that time. It also put the focus on the wisdom and strength of man as opposed to God, who said, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). Amaziah, the priest of the temple in Bethel, was a teacher Jeroboam had accumulated to suit his own passions, therefore it was no surprise that Amaziah abandoned God’s Word and went along with Jeroboam. His life and livelihood was on the line.

So, out of love for His people, God sent the Prophet Amos to warn them that if they continued to cut themselves off from God through their false worship practices, which worshiped the word of man instead of the Word of God, they would be cut off from God forever. After the king, priest and people repeatedly rejected the Word of God through His prophet Amos, in favor of the words of man which appealed to their sinful desires, God showed Amos what He was going to do to them. He would send upon them “*a judgment by fire*” which would devour “*the great deep*” and eat up “*the land*” (7:4).

After God showed Amos these things, Amos pleaded with God for His mercy upon the people. Then “*the LORD relented concerning this: ‘This also shall not be,’ said the Lord GOD*” (v. 6). Immediately after this, Amos said: “*This is what [the Lord GOD] showed me: behold, 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 I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them.*” The words, “*I will never again pass by them*” could also be translated, “*I will never again forgive him.*”

These words speak of the final judgement against the sins of Israel. For the truth is that our repentance or prayers don’t pay for our sins. In the end they still have to be punished, and the wages of sin is a condemning death. So how is it possible for God to do both, to “*relent*” of His judgement against our sins and to not relent? Through His holy “*Plumb Line,*” Jesus Christ. Jesus not only fulfilled God’s Law perfectly, which the perfectly straight plumb line reminds us of, but He also plumbed the depth of hell in payment for all of our sins through His damning death on the cross. He is the “*Him*”—Israel in One, who would be condemned. But then, because He is also God, He rose from the dead, in victory over our sins and the damning death we all deserve, and gives us His eternal life.

This is the love of God, who not only fulfills His judgement against our sins, but also His promise to save us from our sins, through the perfect life, death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord and saving Plumb Line, Jesus Christ. Through this Good News the Spirit of God creates faith in our hearts, faith in God’s Word which enables us to repent of our sins and trust in God’s forgiveness and promise of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

It’s this faith that we seek to share with others, because it’s only this Good News that God works through to not only give us faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, but also enables us, as we said in our confirmation vows, “to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death [like John, Jesus, and countless others] rather than fall away from it.”

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] I would like each of you to draw a strait line on this white board like this |. Now I’m going to hold up this plumb line next to our lines. What do you notice? Our lines are crooked.

This is what happens when we compare our lives to the perfect life of Jesus, God helps us to see that we are crooked sinners. Sin means that we sometimes reject what God says is best for us. To reject what God says is the same as rejecting God—to not want to be with Him. But to be separated from God is hell! Do any of you want to be separated from God in hell with the devil? No.

That’s why God sent us Jesus. Not only does Jesus show us through His perfect life that we are not perfect, but He got rid of our sins and imperfections through His death on the cross and then rose from the dead to give us new and eternal life in Him through His Word and Holy Baptism (heavenly plumb line).

God also gives others this new and eternal life through us when we tell them the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection for our salvation.