

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Mark 10:17-31

Amos is a prophet. Most of us don't really know what a prophet is (unless we spell it with an "F" and an "I" rather than with a "PHE"). A prophet is a spokesperson for the Lord God Almighty. A prophet is someone who brings the Word of the Lord to the people of God (and occasionally, to non-believers as well). Most people think the prophets are *predicting* the future, and saying it's all doom and gloom. Not so. According to Bob Hulteen: "Prophecy is not the result of seeing into the future. Instead, prophecy is the faithful declaration of the implications of current actions on the future, with the hope of having an impact on both (*Sojourners* July-August 1998, 65).

So Amos is a prophet. He's from the smaller, southern kingdom of Judah, delivering a message to the larger, northern kingdom of Israel. So what's a guy from the south Doing up north? Simply put, he's delivering the Word of the Lord. And as we heard from our Hebrews lesson, that Word is a Living Word.

Amos' message can pretty much be boiled down to: Ok, Israel, listen up - Because you've turned away from Lord God Almighty . . . you're gonna die. It's not a real hope filled message there. Actually, we don't get much hope throughout the book of Amos. Unlike most of the prophets, we don't get any message of hope until the very end of the book. That's where we hear: <sup>11</sup>"On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11 NRSV)

Amos is delivering his message at a time of relative peace and prosperity. Each of the kings have been on their respective thrones around thirty-ish years by the time we figure Amos is giving his message. Because of this relative safety, especially in the north, the people have grown . . . let's say, complacent; self-satisfied; maybe even . . . bored. They're going thru the motions of religion, but not being faithful. Amos says of them: "bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; <sup>5</sup> bring a thank offering of leavened bread, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!" says the Lord GOD. (Amos 4:4-5 NRSV) Not only in their relationship with Lord God Almighty; they have grown nearly weary of their relationships with one another: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their (*spouses*), "Bring me something to drink!" (Amos 4:1 NRSV)

Amos has looked around and seen that those with the wealth, he has seen those with the ability, those with the means, to aid those in need, and found them lacking. I think that is the message that we hear that we hear in our lesson this morning: The Word of the Lord that comes to us: but when we put our love of money; when we put our desire for stuff; when we put our passion for things ABOVE our compassion for others, ABOVE our willingness to aid those in need, ABOVE how the Lord God Almighty calls us to live, THEN, we are ourselves are in deep, deep trouble.

Something to remember here: Amos is not crying out against wealth or money or things. He is speaking directly against those who would put money or wealth or things BEFORE God, BEFORE helping others.

Look at our gospel lesson: here's a guy apparently striving to live his life as a believer. He knows the commandments. He's been keeping them since his youth (we don't know how old he is here). Now, maybe he was a shallow kind of a guy, looking to get on Jesus' good side. That's what some commentators think. Maybe he was one of these folk trying to LOOK good, like the folk that Amos railed against - those who are going thru the motions of religion, pretending that its faith. \*I\* think the guy was honest and sincere, because not only does he kneel down before Jesus, what did it say in vs. 21? "Jesus, looking at him, **loved him.**" NO WHERE else in Mark's gospel does it EVER say that Jesus loves ANYBODY. I think this guy meant it. He was striving to live out his life in faithfulness.

Now, scripture never says he's wealthy. It never says he *doesn't* give to the poor. Scripture *doesn't* talk about him being self-centered. But evidently, this guy has a lot of stuff, or at least, he's very much attached to what he has. Scripture does not say he's got the latest and greatest. Scripture doesn't say he's got cutting edge technology, doesn't say he's got the 52 inch LED screen with Dolby 7 surround sound, doesn't say he's got a net book, a note book, and a desktop computer, doesn't say he's got a couple of garages filled with Beamer's and Benz's and Caddies.

Scripture DOES say, that what Jesus tells him, 'You're doing great, there's only one more thing I want you to do: "go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." And how does this guy react? "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions." (v22)

Peter tries to make himself and the disciples look good: "Look, we have left everything and followed you." (v.28) But, we get that great enigmatic saying from Jesus: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (v25) Lots of commentators have attempted to explain this, 'that oh, Jesus is talking figuratively here, or there was a special door in the wall around the city that was very small, only meant for humans and not critters, and it was called the *Eye of the Needle.*' Doesn't matter. The point is, if you depend upon anything OTHER than God for your salvation, it's not happening.

So how does what Amos, from eighth century BCE, and Jesus, from the first Century AD, say, mean squat to us in the twenty-first century North America? Let me give you some homework. When you go home this afternoon, boot up your computer (if you don't have a computer, call up whatever middle school student you know, and ask them to do this for you). Type in the address: [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com). (Global Rich List) Type in your household income (don't worry, it won't ask you for any personal information, it's simply asking for a number - you can MAKE UP a number if you want). It will tell you where you fit in monetarily in the global scale.

I'm not going to tell you the number I put in, but remember, my wife and I both work for non-profit organizations. Our household income puts us in the top 1% of the richest households in the world. I live in a nearly 200 year old house that needs a whole lot of work. I drive a six year old car that I just recently was able to pay off. There's not a single flat panel TV in my house. We

don't eat steak or caviar at every meal. And still, we are the 47,380,745 richest household in the world.

I am not saying to go and sell everything and give it all to Bethesda Mission, or New Hope Ministry. I'm not convinced that's what Jesus meant. What I **Do Think** Jesus is talking about, and what I Do Think has got Amos all up-tight about, is: What do you do with what you have? Whom do I glorify with my paycheck?

Now there stands a good probability that I've annoyed some of you this morning by talking about money. Even though I really wasn't talking about money, or the accumulation of wealth. But if I did annoy anyone, I'm not really sorry, because Amos reminds us that those who have are called to help those in need. And Jesus reminds us, it's not about the stuff.

If we can learn to look at those in need, Those who are suffering - especially those who are suffering thru no fault of their own- If we stop focusing on ourselves, and begin to see those around us. Then the words of Amos will have taken root, and the love of Christ will be with us, indeed.

Amen.