

Amos 8:1-12, Psalm 15, Colossians 1:15-28, Luke 10:38-42

Grace to you and Peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

It's a matter of priorities. Amos saw that the people of Israel had their priorities out of order. He saw the hypocrisy, the greed, the injustice, that the "haves" were inflicting upon the "have nots," and that did not sit well with Amos.

Now to fully appreciate some of the irony that's happening here, we need to realize a few things. First off, Amos is a blue collar guy from the smaller, southern kingdom of Judah, and his message is addressed to the people of the northern, geographically larger, kingdom of Israel. Specifically, his message is addressed to the business owners, the white collar folk, management, the people who are well off, who are *not* hurting, those who *are* rather very comfortable. He is confronting them on several different aspects of their lives.

In our reading this morning, Amos is focused on the business practices that were happening at the time. Store owners were cheating their customers. They were using weights that were off; scales that were rigged; liquid measurements that were too small (*that's what some of those words you might not have known were referring to*). Other merchants could hardly wait until the Sabbath was over before they could start cheating their customers once again.

Those "practices" in and of themselves are bad, but what makes the situation worse is that it's **AMOS** who is delivering the message. Here's some guy from snooty Judah who has come to call the kettle black. Because, the folks down in Judah, they were the ones who tended to go around with their noses in the air, "we have Solomon's temple," "we worship in Jerusalem," "we have a descendant of David upon our throne." For a person from Judah to go to Israel and chastise them for their bad behavior is rather like someone who has lived through the race riots in York coming to Camp Hill and calling us a bunch of bigots, or (from a different geographical direction) someone from Hazleton telling us that we're anti-Hispanic.

The book of Amos, I will admit, is not an easy book to read. It is short enough - only nine chapters - but these chapters are filled with listings of abuse and injustice and hypocrisy because the priority of the people of Israel had become their pockets, not their faith.

They were "religious" enough. They went to temple. They made their sacrifices. They prayed their prayers, and they made certain everybody saw them coming into temple fashionably late, "Oh, look at me; see what a great believer I am." THAT is what Amos is speaking out against: the abuse of power, the abuse of position, the abuse of piety. They've got their priorities all messed up. They are so busy looking out for themselves that they're failing to see the wrong that they are doing. They are so busy looking at what they *Don't* have and steaming about ways to get what

they don't have, that they are not seeing the people they are cheating as people. Rather they are seeing them simply as a means to an end, and their end is going to justify EVERYTHING they do. Amos has come to straighten out their priorities.

There is a somewhat similar situation of confused priorities in our gospel message as well. Jesus and the disciples are invited into the home of Martha and her sister Mary. These women did the invitation. They are the hosts. They are the ones who are responsible - according to any good manners any time throughout history - to provide the refreshments, the food and drink, and at this point in history, water and a towel to wash your feet. Martha is all over this. She's got this down. Mary, though, is seeing this as an opportunity for learning. Well, maybe she is carried away by Jesus' good looks; possibly she's heard his message before and she wants to hear more - we don't know. All we know is for sure that Martha is working away at preparing food and drink and Mary has plopped herself there literally at the feet of Jesus, listening intently.

Maybe Martha does a few unsubtle coughs, (*ahem, ahem, ahem*) in order to get her sister's attention to come and help her out; maybe she "accidentally" drops something. Probably she's just staying in the kitchen, stewing in her own juices until she can't take it anymore, because, whatever's going on, we **do** know that she finally comes out and confronts, not her sister, the one she's ticked off at - she confronts her Guest, Jesus. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to come and help me." And now while "I" might just say, 'Martha get a grip,' she' is doing the right thing. She's is the hostess, she's getting the food ready, she's setting the table, she's getting the dishes put out and doing whatever needs to get done to comfort the folks that SHE HERSELF HAS INVITED INTO HER HOME. She's got her priorities pretty much right on, *until* she call Jesus on the carpet for her sister's lack of action.

Mary though, well we could say she's got her priorities straight. She wants to learn and listen from Jesus. Now really can ANY ONE of us really blame her for that? They're both, I think, for the most part doing mostly the right thing. They're incredibly focused on what they're doing, so much so to the exclusion of their sibling. Maybe Mary could have said, "I REALLY want to hear what Jesus has to say, so let me be the one to take the stuff out. Let me be the one to serve the drinks while you prepare the food so that I can listen to him," or maybe Martha could have been a little bit more understanding and told Mary, "you go and you listen to Jesus, but you COME in here when I need you." Neither one of them had their priorities quite dead on straight.

Here at Trinity, we have been talking for several months about priorities: What are we looking for in a new senior pastor? Where do we as a congregation want to go in this new century? Trinity, I think, has been fairly good over the decades in looking at and setting priorities. It was the late 1800's that there was a group of believers who felt there was a need for a strong Lutheran presence here in Camp Hill. This congregation was formed. Those same folks built a worship space that stood for fifty years, and when they realized that was no longer adequate for their needs, we built a new worship space. We added to our facility which has now stood

for over fifty years. Is this still meeting our needs? We currently have five times of worship during the week, we're soon going to be starting a sixth. Is our brick and mortar meeting the needs, the vision, of this congregation, or are there other ways that might be more beneficial to the ministry that we do? Our preschool program has maxed out its space. Do we want to expand it? If so, how can we do that? There are week nights when every usable room in our facility has a group in it. What if we had more rooms available, would that be a good thing? Do I even need to say anything about parking on a Sunday morning?

What are the priorities of our congregation? We need to know, any individual who is seriously considering coming here as a senior pastor, or as a congregation member, will want to know, what we are about, where are our concerns, how are we actively proclaiming the gospel of Christ Jesus through our activities, our outreach and our worship?

For Amos and the people of Israel, things did not end well. Israel does not heed the warnings of Amos. They continue to actively turn away from the Lord God, and although Amos is preaching at a time of peace, in a few decades after him, Israel falls to the Assyrians. The people are absorbed into the masses and those Ten Tribes that made up the northern kingdom are lost for all time. Life *will* get better for ALL believers, Amos says at the end of his prophesy. At the end of chapter nine, Amos says,

'The Lord God says that ¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.' (Amos 9:14 NRSV)

Life will get better, Amos says, but it is going to be worse first.

We know that Martha and Mary had to endure the death of their brother, Lazarus. And yet, because of that death, their faith becomes stronger. We as a church, as a congregation, as individuals, are called to set our priorities on God. We are called to serve the Lord God in everything that we are doing, we are called by our baptism to treat other people fairly. We are called to listen when spoken to. We are called to serve sometimes when we even don't want to. We are called to set our priorities on God, and then follow when God leads us.

Amen.