

Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 14, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Amos 7:7-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Roughly 70 years after Elisha by some calculations, Amos delivered his prophecy to Israel. Amos was not a "prophet" in the professional class of prophets who are mentioned moving about in Israel but rather he is a herder who has been given a prophetic word to proclaim. While prophesy in modern usage is associated with future predictions, in biblical terms a "prophet" is a person who has received a message from God to deliver to God's people. This message may address a future event but more often it is a present warning to change their behavior now to avoid a future disaster. A prophet may also give a word of comfort or blessing to a people in need. Amos' message, however, is a message of destruction the people have brought upon themselves. While God has something to say to all of Israel's neighbors including Judah (1:3-2:5), the bulk of God's displeasure lies with Israel. It is not because of how Israel treated others but how it has treated its own people. They have "oppressed the poor" and "crush the needy" (4:1). At the beginning of Chapter seven, Amos successfully pleads on behalf of Israel but then the Lord finally says that his wrath will no longer "pass them by" (7:8). In a society without steel reinforcement, knowing the center of gravity especially in the walls is critical to the stability of the building. Using a plumb line, the builder can determine if the wall's center of gravity has begun to lean or if the foundation has shifted. If the wall is not "plumb", it must be rebuilt or the building will collapse. God has judged that Israel has lost its center and must be torn down to its base.

Commentary on Colossians 1:1-14 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The church in Colossae would have been located near the modern day city of Denizli in Turkey. The city was hit by an earthquake around the time of Paul's letter (60-62 A.D.) and was eventually deserted. The church was founded by one of Paul's disciples Epaphras which is why Paul writes "we have heard". Due to reports of false teachings about the nature of Christ, Paul writes to the Colossians while he is imprisoned in Rome. While the authorship has been questioned by scholars due to writing style, the substance and message is consistent with the letters of Paul. After a typical greeting of grace, peace, and thanksgiving, Paul reminds them that the true gospel bears fruit. This gospel message is rooted in "faith" in Christ Jesus, "love" for one another, and "hope" in a place in heaven. Paul then encourages them to remember the love of the Spirit which gives them spiritual wisdom and understanding so they may continue to bear fruit. The focus of the letter is now established. Something is leading them away from spiritual wisdom and understanding threatening their fruitfulness. The purpose of the letter is to remind them of the correct understanding of faith, hope, and love found in Jesus Christ.

Commentary on Luke 10:25-37 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After the return of the seventy in Luke's chronology, Jesus is tested by the lawyer in which he names the greatest commandments. Unlike Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34, the encounter with the lawyer does not stop with Jesus' answer but continues with a discussion concerning who is one's neighbor. The following parable is one of the most familiar stories from the New Testament and is the foundation for the "Good Samaritan" law that protects people who stop to give aid. There are a few points often overlooked because of the original Greek. The word "test" in Luke comes from the Greek root word "to tempt" and can only be found once in Psalm 78:18, in Deuteronomy (6:16, 8:2, 8:16), New Testament references to Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:7, Luke 4:12), and 1 Corinthians 10:9. In all cases, the word is used as a warning not to test the LORD. This simple word changes the entire exchange between the lawyer and Jesus. This is not a matter of curiosity but one of human pride

challenging God. Realizing that he has overstepped but not wanting to be wrong, the lawyer tries to "justify" himself. In his letters, Paul will argue using the same word that only God can "justify" a person. Finally, when Jesus is finished with the parable and questions he says "Go and do likewise". This is not a dismissal but a command. The words "go" and "do" are in the present imperative which in Greek takes on the tone of a command. In English, another way of writing it would be, "Go! Do likewise!" Given the "testing" of Jesus and the attempt to "justify" himself, the lawyer is being sternly rebuked.

Sermon Summary (Youtube [*Sermon Video*](#))

In 1984, Tina Turner released a song that asked the simple question, "What's love got to do with it?". For a Christian, the answer is simple - EVERYTHING! God so loved the world that he sent his son Jesus. Jesus so loves us that he gave his life for us on the cross. Of all the gifts the Holy Spirit gives, love is the greatest. All that God asks of us is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. If that is too complicated, Jesus us to love as he has loved us. In his letter, John sums it up quite simply, "God is love" and "those who abide in love abide in God". For John Wesley, perfection does not mean the absence of mistakes but the abundance of love. Love has got to do with everything.

When the lawyer tests Jesus, Jesus points him the section in Deuteronomy dealing with love God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul and loving our neighbor as ourselves. When the lawyer asks for a definition of neighbor, Jesus does not define neighbor but love through the actions of a Samaritan. The answer - everyone is our neighbor! It is almost impossible to truly show love to others if we fail to appropriate love ourselves. This is in part due to the fact that we judge others based on how we feel that we are judged. This begs the question, how do we learn to love ourselves. We learn love through the eyes of others. In some cases, there are abundant examples to glean from but for others there may be very few instances of true love. The one experience that can be universally shared is the love God has for us in Jesus Christ. This is not just limited to the Biblical stories but a personal encounter with God through the grace given in Jesus Christ. It is through God's love for us that we can begin to love ourselves and appropriately love others.

This gift of love given by the power of the Holy Spirit is surrounded by the gifts of faith and hope. Faith is the firm assurance that all that has happened in the past is covered by Jesus' Christ forgiveness given on the cross. Repentance and Faith go hand in hand. If we give our guilt and failures to God, we must have faith that we are free to move forward. We are also free from the fear of the future because of the gift of hope. Hope is the assurance that God's promises will come to pass. Once we are free from the past and free from worry about the future, then we are free to love and bear fruit now. This is the message Paul was reminding the Colossians.

The message of freedom, however, does not negate responsibility. If we have been made free to love, then we will be judged on how well we love. Love is the plumb line by which our lives will be judged. We have only been given one commandment, love as God has loved us. In the end, our lives will not be judged on how right we were but by how much we loved. We have been warned and given the gifts to love,. The only question left is will we love.