

Amos 5:14-15; 21-24
Amos, a Dresser of Sycamore Trees
SWCoB 11.10.13

The thought for today is:

1.

 Pontius' Puddle



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So, this guy comes into the sanctuary during worship.

You can tell he's from the country.

He's wearing bib-overalls

He's chewing on a piece of straw

And he looks like he's just come in from the barn.

He insists that he's not a minister

Nor a minister's son

But that God has laid something on his heart.

He says he runs a sheep ranch

And is a, "a dresser of sycamore trees"

Whatever that is.

He walks down to the front of the sanctuary
And interrupts the worship service.

And despite being asked to leave by the ushers
In a loud voice, he starts to yell

2.

Amos 5:21-24 (MSG)

21-24 “I can’t stand your religious meetings.

**I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions.
I want nothing to do with your religion projects,
your pretentious slogans and goals.
I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes,
your public relations and image making.
I’ve had all I can take of your noisy ego-music.**

When was the last time you sang to *me*?

Do you know what I want?

I want justice—oceans of it.

I want fairness—rivers of it.

That’s what I want. That’s *all* I want.

~~

What would you think about that?

I dare say we wouldn’t know what to think!

Once we’ve recovered our composure
We’d mutter under our breath
What a loser the guy was

And try and finish worship.

~~

Guess what? The guy who said it made it into the Bible!

He was the prophet, Amos.

He was not a religious leader
Not a son or grandson of a religious leader
He was a farmer.

And what he had to say
Made it into the Holy Scriptures.

What he said we consider the Word of God!

~~

Amos lived during the middle of the 8th century B.C.
Roughly one hundred years following Elijah
Two hundred years after Solomon.

Amos was from the south, the southern kingdom of Judah
But he went to the north to minister.

Maybe his work with sycamore trees led him there.

~~

The Bible says he was a dresser of sycamore trees.

Now, this sycamore tree is not the tree as we know it.

It was more like a fig tree that bore fruit.

And to make the fruit edible it needed puncturing.

And so, Amos went around puncturing holes in fruit.

Apparently, even then it wasn't all that good.

It was a poor person's food.

Amos traveled the countryside working
To supplement his farm income
Getting to know a lot of people far and wide.

~~

During this period of time
Israel's society had evolved into different social classes.

A rich and wealthy class developed
As well as a poor and impoverished underclass.

Amos, because of his work among peasants
Knew the situation well.

Knew of people selling themselves into slavery
For a debt valued at little more than a pair of shoes.

Amos also knew of synagogues
Crowded with complacent worshippers
Who bragged of their good fortunes.

Knew of rich priests who catered to the wealthy.

Knew they'd never caution them
For their life of self-indulgence.

Amos couldn't stomach it anymore.

~~

He lashes out against the small, but powerful upper class.

He is crass, he is crude, he is callous

He is more comfortable with barnyard verbiage
Than he is with proper discourse.

He starts in on the women

3.

Amos 4:1-3 (MSG)

**4 "Listen to this, you cows of Bashan
grazing on the slopes of Samaria.**

**You women! Mean to the poor,
cruel to the down-and-out!**

**Indolent and pampered, you demand of your husbands,
'Bring us a tall, cool drink!'**

**²⁻³ "This is serious—I, God, have sworn by my holiness!
Be well warned: Judgment Day is coming!"**

I'm sure Amos went over real well with the rich womenfolk!

And then, he turns to the rich in general.

4.

Amos 6:4-7 (NRSV)

**⁴ Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;**

**⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;**

**⁶ who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!**

**⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.**

~~

So what's Amos' beef?

He saw Israel on the road to self-destruction.

A rich class had emerged, getting wealthier and wealthier
While the poor became poorer and poorer.

Amos couldn't stand seeing the injustices
Against the impoverished lower class.

He couldn't the hypocrisy.

For it was church-folk who got their wealth
Off the backs of the poor.

They did their religious duties very well
Attended church
Served on committees
Paid their dues.

The problem was that they didn't live their faith
Outside of church!

They went to church as obedient people do.

But when they weren't in church
They were scheming how to make more money
At the expense of their neighbors.

~~

Amos' beef was that there was a disconnect
Between what happened at the synagogue
And what took place at the home and market place.

What really got Amos' goat was . . .

How they could go to church every Sunday
Sing praises and give their tithes

And then spend the rest of the week
Profiting at the expense of their neighbor?

If justice and righteousness weren't part and parcel of faith
Than praise and worship
Was just noise to the ears of God.

That was Amos' beef!

~~

We think of worship as a Sunday morning thing.

But worship is not just what occurs on a Sunday morning.

We worship God in the way we live our lives.

Yes, we worship God with our songs of praise
Our financial contributions
And our efforts in the ministry of the church.

But we also worship God in our behavior
At home, work and school.

Our lives are to be lived with integrity.

Doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God
Are all acts of worship.

~~

But let's be honest, Amos is speaking to us, too.

Because if you're anything like me
There are things in my life
That are not worshipful.

I confess I can do better.

It's not that I don't try, I do.
And I suspect the same for you.

Sometimes, we don't consciously neglect God's will.

We just live our lives forgetting that our lives lived
Is also an act of worship to God.

~~

I believe most of us here want to please God.

We want to do what's right.

But we're human and we get caught up in other things.

It brings to mind a prayer by the late Thomas Merton
A Catholic monk and mystic

5.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself. And the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

6.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this You will lead me by the right road Though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone (Thomas Merton)..

~~

We never arrive at the place of perfection.

We are all a “work in progress.”

God is aware of that!

For as Tullian Tchividjian, (tivijin)

Grandson to Billy Graham,

Said in an article in Christianity Today

7.

The Bible is one long story of God meeting our rebellion with his rescue, our sin with his salvation, our guilt with his grace (Tullian Tchividjian).

Amos was not a religious leader

Trained in theology, hermeneutics, or NT Greek.

He was a farmer and a dresser of Sycamore trees.

My dad, growing up in a small country church

Says that some of its best preachers

Were not the seminary-trained ones

But the down-to-earth ones

Who knew how to apply religion to everyday experiences.

They weren't educated enough

To know how to beat around the theological bush

They spoke their mind using examples from country living.

Amos' words are not easy words to hear.

He spoke from the heart

And called people to greater living.

Not too many churches would have kept him employed.

They'd give him his walking papers, like, right now!

Tradition has it, in fact, that he was killed

By orders of Amaziah, the high priest at Bethel.

So let us pray

That God would accept our worship with grace.

Not only what we do here on Sunday morning

But our worship in everyday life.

May God accept our us as we are,

And through his Holy Spirit

Transform us more and more

Into the people he made us to be.

May our attempts of worship be sincere and from the heart.

May God help us to be participants in kingdom living

So that God's love, grace, and justice will indeed

Roll down like waters

And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

This is our prayer. Amen.