

One of the interesting things the Old Testament Lesson for today brings us is the real responsibility of the prophet of God. We have grown use to thinking of prophets as those who are able to tell us the truth about the future. What a thorough reading of the Old Testament requires, however, is the understanding that a prophet of God is more often called upon to bring forth the uncomfortable truths about the present. And that is what Amos is doing this morning. Israel has become a corrupt nation, and idol-worship as led by wicked priests such as Amaziah has become the accepted norm. But, God generally calls on a prophet to issue condemnation against sinful idolatry in all its various forms. And such prophets, like Amos, are almost always rebuffed. People, it would seem, do not like to confront their brokenness, even when it is in the interests of their immortal souls to do so. And therefore, the wisdom expressed in Proverbs about how different is the way in which the wicked receive rebuke from those reactions of the righteous lives on:

“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.” ([Proverbs 9:7-9](#) – ESV)

It was intriguing for me to find this week that, when this particular passage in our Lectionary with the account from Amos Chapter 7 rolls around, I am not the only pastor inclined to think of the modern-day martyr Oscar Romero, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador during that country’s bloody war of the 1970s and 1980s. Daniel Clendenin has posted similar comparisons in his website www.journeywithJesus.net.



A part of the Wall of Martyrs at Westminster Abbey. Oscar Romero is depicted holding a child, between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Romero became the most outspoken critic of the government and a passionate defender of the dispossessed. His first death threat came from none other than president Arturo Molina, who warned him that priestly garments were not bulletproof. In his very last sermon, on Sunday March 23 [1980], Romero explained his Amos-like vocation: “I have no ambition of power, and because of that I freely tell those in power what is good and what is bad, and I do the same with any political group — it is my duty... The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God’s words, ‘thou shalt not kill.’ No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to the law of God. In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people, I beseech you, I implore you; in the name of God I command you to stop the repression!” The next evening at about 6:30pm, a gunman shot Romero as he celebrated the Mass at a small chapel in the La Divina Providencia hospital where he lived. Later investigations established that the assassination was contracted by the government military.”¹

You see, Archbishop Romero, like Amos of the Old Testament was performing the principle mission of the prophet – speaking divine truth to earthly power. And the corrupt practitioners in El Salvador, just like Amaziah the wicked priest really didn’t want to listen. So, the world spins on.

The plumb line in Amos (See vv.7:7-9) represents God’s judgment of righteousness. By Amos’s time, the ruling class in Israel had become idolatrous, and had rejected the practice of Yahweh’s Torah. And Amos reminds them that the judgment of God is not only unavoidable, but perfect. They will be condemned for their

¹ See Daniel B. Clendenin’s *Remembering Romero: Amos the Prophet vs. Amaziah the Priest* www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20100705JJ.shtml

wickedness. Recently, in our Daily Office readings, In Matthew 21 when the Chief Priests and Elders in the Temple tried to undermine Jesus' authority to perform miracles of healing, Our Lord quoted verses from Psalm 118 when he said, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.'" (Ps.118:22-23 as quoted in Mt. 21:42) There can be no perfection by human means. We simply don't have the ability to save ourselves from our own folly, and we are all fallen short of righteousness in God's eyes. Perfect adherence to the law simply isn't humanly possible. But we are told in Romans 10, the Daily Office epistle for this past Friday, that Christ is the final completion of the law. What amazing good news! By the grace of God through the faith in Christ you and I are forgiven and redeemed, despite our unworthiness. This is great, good news! Yet, perversely, so often in our brokenness, we turn away from this good news. It is the nature of fallen man to be in denial about our own weakness.

The main message of Colossians is one of the awesome power which is available to the fellowship of believers through our inheritance through The Christ. There is the eternal glory that awaits us in God's heavenly Kingdom. (See Col.1:4-5, 12) And both the Apostle Paul and John of Patmos refer to a state that awaits us in the here-after, when we shall actually share in the exalted glory of Our Lord. (See 2Tim.2:12; Rev. 20:4) But in Colossians, Paul takes this concept of the glory we all share to a different level. At the beginning of this letter, Paul describes the power we are given through the faith in Christ **even in this very present age**. (See Col.1:11)

This glorified state that awaits the believer is also depicted in the Psalm for this morning. (See Ps. 82:6) Sadly, the tie between Ps. 82:6 and its New Testament points again once again to the broken state of human frailty in which you and I for a time must live. In John Chapter 10, When Jesus quotes this psalm in order to tell that Jews that, not only is he the Son of God, but that all believers will share in His gift of the heavenly state, they try to murder him. (See Jn.10:31-39) Part of the tragedy of the human condition is how much we resist the call to change and grow, even when that growth and transformation would result in incredible joy and fulfillment. C.S. Lewis was right when he pointed out that most people, rather than joining in the heavenly banquet, would rather spend their earthly lives playing with mud pies.²

The profound transformation that awaits the Christian upon his/her salvation is beautifully represented by the Parable of the Good Samaritan we heard today. Samaritans were considered pagan scoundrels by the Jews of Jesus' day. They were among the most ill-treated class of Jewish society. Yet, Jesus not only identifies the Samaritans of our world as our neighbors, but reminds us that it is the very ones we find difficult to love whom we must love the most. We are to love even the low-life outcasts and rebellious pagans of our day just as much as we love those whom society respects and admires. How is this possible?

For the first time, in the preparation of the sermon for Luke 10 this year, it has struck me that the emotion stirred in the breast of this Samaritan to help the wounded stranger on the road to Jericho is a kind of rendering of the Crucifixion itself. This Samaritan was greatly moved by the suffering state of this traveler there on the journey through life. His bleeding tormented body stirred in the Samaritan's heart a sense of mercy and pity which led that man to offer aid to this perfect stranger. What is it that can stir that same kind of emotion in the depths of your soul and mine? What could possibly move me to such a point as to love even the unlovable of this world? Only the Cross of Jesus could do that. Only the perfect gift of the life of this perfect Son of God, offered freely for the likes of you and me could melt the hardness of the human heart, and transform us into children of God. And so, with that kind of image, example, and witness of love, the love of Jesus for the whole wide world, we can follow in his footsteps and be his hands and his feet. By the grace of God, we can be Jesus to others. We can indeed, just as He instructed "Go, and do likewise." JWB+ 7/08/16

² In his sermon "The Weight of Glory, Lewis writes: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."